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Detailed Review on Samtskhe-Javakheti

by Andro Barnovi

After the August war in Georgia, Russia has advanced in the South Caucasus and seeks to further strengthen its influence in the region. Moscow has plenty of levers in its possession and the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia is among the most important targets of Moscow – as one containing the part of BTC pipeline. The situation is alarming because Russia has long acted as destructive force in the area and tried to trigger tensions between the local population and the government of Georgia. Notwithstanding the removal of Russian bases from Akhalkalaki, the policy continues to this date.



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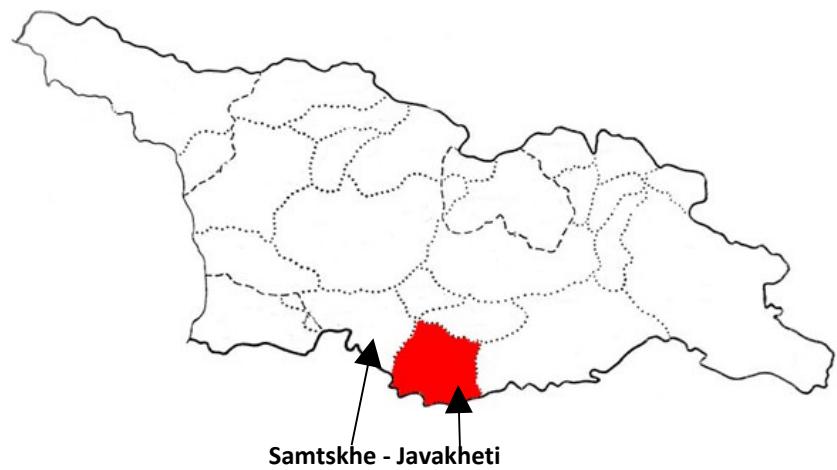
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About Samtskhe-Javakheti (SJ)



PREFACE

After the August war in Georgia, Russia has advanced in the South Caucasus and seeks to further strengthen its influence in the region. Moscow has plenty of levers in its possession and the Samtskhe-Javakheti region of Georgia is among the most important targets of Moscow – as one containing the part of BTC pipeline. The situation is alarming because Russia has long acted as destructive force in the area and tried to trigger tensions between the local population and the government of Georgia. Notwithstanding the removal of Russian bases from Akhalkalaki, the policy continues to this date.

It is important that not only the government, but also wide community in and outside the country, receives “early warning” of the situation there. It is important that government also pays more attention to the problem and elaborates the systemic view of the situation and further developments. It is important also, that all other players including the Church, civil society, international community and general public – stand together to think through and act together to stand against unacceptable escalation in the region.

Samtskhe-Javakheti – a Georgian region with large Armenian population – needs a careful approach and intelligent policies. It necessarily needs more attention and care from all sides especially because there have been lots of mistakes and missed opportunities in the past.

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20/01/2009

SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

Sources

In attempting to create objective picture of the developments in SJ, <http://www.djavakhk.com> website of extreme Armenian nationalist sentiment was chosen as main source of information. The website provides no information about its owners, but as it is known, it is operated from Yerevan, and tracks record of SJ-related developments mainly from various Armenian, Russian and Georgian sources. Independent articles are also provided on the site. The website is run on four languages – English, French, Russian and Armenian, but the number of articles on these languages does not coincide with each other. The most updated version is the English version of the website, which was used as source during this research.

The information provided on the site is in many terms disputable, especially those regarding the history of the region and the ones containing subjective judgment of the developments. But the website has the value of having tracked SJ related events from the year 1992, and very intensively from 2002. Nearly 90% of all articles have been included into the analysis. Only those articles which did not contain particular information and only presented subjective judgment of the developments were omitted. All in all, 8 articles were analyzed for the period of 1992-2001, 32 articles were analyzed for the year 2002, 29 articles were analyzed for 2003, 58 articles – for 2004, 72 articles – for 2005, 375 articles – for 2006, 76 articles – for 2007, and 21 articles – for 2008. Total 671 articles were included into the analysis. Out of these, the first one dates with January 9, 1992 and the last one – November 6, 2008.

Other sources include various publications about SJ history and separatist problem, and analyses by different respected international organizations.

Methodology

Apart from general judgment of the developments and analysis, functional, structural and content analysis is also carried out: each entry (information) is given titles describing the role they played during the particular event. Each entry opens with such description and is provided in red. These functions were later embodied on the timeline from 2002 to 2008, and grouped according to (1) type of action and (2) actors.

Also, descriptions were converted into broad functions and allocated above and below “0” axis according to the logic of conflict escalation. “0” value was assigned to the concession/cooperation/conflict settlement function. Other values were distributed among “6” and “-6”, as follows:

Intimidation from foreign state	6
Demands from foreign state	5
Collaboration with foreign state	4
Action of locals (violence)	3
Action of locals (rallies)	2
Demands of locals/outside support	1
Cooperation w/Government	0
Gov. takes control	-1
Gov. launches integration/development programs	-2
Gov. launches appeasement policies	-3
Gov. undertakes pressure	-4
Gov. takes anti-Armenian stance	-5
Gov. takes anti-Russian stance	-6

For better visualization purposes and according to these values, interaction of different forces in SJ has been embodied on special charts and provided in chapter “history of separatism problem in SJ” for each year from 2002 to 2007 (incl.).

Also, in order to clearly see who's been the most active force during all these years, activities (according to their typology and regardless their real content) were mapped on special chart and provided in a special table.

Armenian Population of SJ¹

Armenians have compactly resided in Southern Georgia for about 180 years. When after the war with Turkey (1828-1829), Russia managed to cease the Black Sea coast and the largest portion of Georgian provinces of Meskheti and Javakheti, the Armenians who previously lived on the Turkish territory, began to massively resettle to the territories of the Russian empire. They settled in Javakheti and soon outnumbered indigenous Georgians: in 1903, the majority of 54,816 people living in 150 villages of the district were Armenian. After 1829, 2,536 Armenian families resettled to the neighboring Meskheti from Erzurum, while smaller groups of their compatriots had lived there earlier as well; in 1913, 41,873 Armenians lived in the Akhaltsikhe district (16,499 in the city, the rest in 16 Armenian villages). On the eve of the Bolshevik coup, Armenians amounted to as much as 82% of the entire population of the Akhaltsikhe district.

According to the 1989 census, 437,211 Armenians lived in Georgia (8.1% of the total population). Roughly 150 000 lived in Tbilisi and also 75 000 in Abkhazia. The largest group, however (about 200 000), lived in Javakheti (over 90% of the local population) and Meskheti (about 1/3 of the local population).

"SJ Problem" (brief description)

The so called "separatism problem" in SJ could be subdivided on three main trends:

1. COLLABORATIONISM – mostly related with the issue of Russian military base in Akhalkalaki (before withdrawal), and also another issues directly related with foreign interests and opposed to those of Georgia.
2. SEPARATISM AS SUCH - understood as detaching Javakheti from Georgia by means of either independence or merging with Armenia.
3. SELF-DETERMINATION – with its multiple trends like demands for autonomy, granting official regional status to Armenian language, "Church question", including Armenian history classes in the schools, etc.

It should be said also, that SJ ethnic Armenians do not attach their identity to solely SJ. Rather, there is general problem with Armenian minority in Georgia and SJ has been most visible due to two reasons, being (1) large concentration of ethnic Armenians in the region (over 90% in Javakheti and about 55% in SJ total) and the location of the region (border with Armenia and Turkey, and the route for BTC). There have been events during these years when an accident in Tsalka (not in SJ) or Tbilisi have triggered problems in SJ. Russian and Armenian interests, Russian intimidation and Armenian meddling – all of these have served as triggers to escalate tensions in SJ.

The reality of SJ problem is being represented by different types of actors, different types of actions and different issues. The reality also includes different types of outside supporters. These mostly include:

Types of Actors:

- POLITICAL MOVEMENTS – they are illegal as political parties but still operate in the form of NGOs. Born from "Javakhk" movement as its most radical wing, this has mostly been "**Virk**" organization since early 90s and until 2005, while the organization started to cooperate with the government and its radical wing has transformed into "**United Javakhk**" movement, with **Vahagn Chakhalyan** its leader.
- NGOs – not really active as independent organizations but serve as "stuffing" to augment representation of political movements. Only couple of NGOs stands out with their activity. SJ Armenian NGOs mostly act united in the form of "**Coalition of Armenian NGOs**" of Javakheti. **A-Info** stands out as comparably independent player. Apart from spreading information about the developments in SJ, A-Info has several times served to Russian provocations in the region as a tool for spreading misinformation. Many SJ Armenian organizations have their "twins" in Armenia and act on some common platform.

¹ Voitsekh Guretski: *The Question of Javakheti*, Caucasian Regional Studies, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 1998. Cited work: Miroslava Zakrzewska-Dubasova, *Historia Armen*, Wroclaw, 1990, pp.168-179; The Issue (Case) of Armenia. Encyclopedia. Edit. K.S. Khudaverdyan, Yerevan, 1991, A.Melkonyan, article "Akhalkalak", pp 67; A. Melkonyan, article "Akhaltska", pp 67-68

- ARMENIAN OPPPOSITION PARTIES, (**Revolutionary Federation (ARF) Dashnaksutsyun**) has always had very close ties with “Virk” and later “Javakhk”. ARF is the most active political force in Armenia to raise SJ question and demand reaction from the government.
- RUSSIAN MILITARY BASE had been another most important force to influence developments in SJ. While there are few immediate evidences of cooperation between the Russian military base and locals, dynamics of events prove that main trigger of tensions in the region has always been Russian base: Escalation of relations between Georgia and Russia has always been followed by escalation in SJ; Also, “Russian base” occupies the second place by frequency in demands of local Armenian organizations (after autonomy).
- LOCAL POPULATION – seldom acts independently and mostly follows leader organizations. It is notable though, that locals are well organized. It has never been problem for the organizations to collect hundreds or even thousands of people for protests, rallies or even some violent action. Locals attach their identity to the region but even more so to Armenia. Many times, they have waved **Armenian flags** during the protests.
- INDEPENDENT LEADERS are almost non-existent as most of them are affiliated with some organization. It is hard to say that there is someone in SJ whom people respect for some personal traits and would follow him/her. However, there are few leaders who, being regularly very active, stand out with their recognition and probably, influence. **David Rstakyan** has been one of such leaders in the past (and remains up till today), and 26 year-old **Vahagn Chakhalyan** is another such person. He is current leader of “United Javakhk” movement. It can be believed that both leaders are very closely affiliated with Russia. When, in 2006, Moscow was unwillingly withdrawing military bases from Georgia, **Armenia detained Chakhalyan** fearing that he might trigger conflict in the region. Following the protests of opposition forces in Armenia (mostly ARFD), Yerevan has later released him.
- ARMENIA – has always been very cautious with “SJ problem”. As being locked between Azerbaijan and Turkey, Armenia is heavily dependent on Georgia with its communication routes. Yerevan understands that possible conflict in SJ (even if Armenia does not participate in it) would finally isolate the country and this will necessarily lead to very serious economic collapse. During these years, there have been instances of direct cooperation between Armenia and Georgia to jointly try to calm down tensions in SJ. However, Georgian – Armenian relations stand far from ideal and there always is latent tension in place. The most harming issue to these relations is Turkey-led Kars railway project which, unlike the issue of Russian military base in Akhalkalaki, has caused very serious doubts in Yerevan.
- DIASPORA – Armenian Diaspora is very active in SJ, but their involvement is mostly positive. Main directions of Diaspora activities relate to preserving cultural heritage and survival of ethnic identity of the locals.
- ARMENIAN CHURCH – its involvement is also mostly positive and very similar to that of Diaspora.
- INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY – defined here as international organizations and partner states, mostly being USA and Germany, but also France in few instances – are very helpful in carrying out integration programs and development of the region.
- GEORGIAN GOVERNMENT – has been very inert until 2003. After Rose revolution, SJ has faced number of actions of the Government, ranging from pressure, control, integration and development programs, appeasement policies, cooperation with Armenia on SJ issue, etc.
- GEORGIAN CIVIL SOCIETY – very inactive. During all these years, there are only very few initiatives carried out by Georgian NGOs.
- ARMENIAN NGOS – are quite active in SJ issues. **Yerkir Union** stands out of them. They help SJ Armenians in legal issues and also serve as bridge between SJ kin and Armenian society.

Types of Actions:

- RALLIES – have been very popular during these years. As a rule, rallies occur as a result of anti-Russian policies of the government and as response to some kind of violent accident or injustice of the government. But even in cases of accidents like killing ethnic kin not necessarily in SJ but in any other region of Georgia, and taking into account measures of appeasement from the side of government, the scale of frustration has been so high in ethnic Armenians, that it always provokes thoughts that rallies are managed from “outside”.
- VIOLENT CLASHES – violent clashes don't occur very often. If they occur, then as a rule, it is caused by preceding violence or “Church question”. Killing of ethnic Armenian and infringement of religious feelings are the two questions that worry people most of all.
- BLOCKADES – can be viewed as just a form of protest. Mostly used on Georgian-Armenian border.
- STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS – statements are regularly issued by SJ organizations about any kind of event that deserves their attention. Statements mostly disapprove government's policies (sometimes unjustly) and contain demands on various issues like autonomy, language status, church question, etc. It is normal in these statement to declare that “Georgians want extinction of Armenians in SJ”, and the like.

Issues of disagreement between the government and SJ Armenian population:

- Political status of the region
- Ethnic identity-related issues (language, Churches, etc)
- Religious issues
- Russian military base removal (incl. 2007)
- Baku-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway
- Social and economic issues (in spite of social and economic underdevelopment of the region, this question is being raised least of all)

Outside Supporters of SJ Ethnic Armenian population:

- **Official Russia** – supporter of separatism
- **Official Armenia** – interested in maintaining influence as to lever Georgian policies; not inclined to support separatism
- **Armenian opposition** – more radical in declarations but little danger to separatism. SJ question is normally being used by opposition to press government of Armenia
- **Armenian Diaspora** – supports kin to prevent their assimilation
- **International community/organizations** – support integration and development programs, closely cooperate with Georgian government

Triggers of escalation:

Triggers of escalation have been of different categories:

- a. Russian strategic interest/anti-Turkish
- b. Russian direct threat to Georgia
- c. Information/provocation/misinformation
- d. Violent accident

- e. Armenia's meddling
- f. Government action
- g. Diaspora action
- h. Armenian Clergy action
- i. Violent accident

Who carries out these actions?

According to the information which was included into the current analysis, types of action which are typical for different actors (statements, demands, direct action) are grouped and distributed as follows:

Typical statements

Georgian Government	makes anti-Russian/Armenian statements
VIRK	
JAVAKHK	make anti-Georgian/Turkish statements
SJ NGOs	
Armenia	
Arm. Church	claims rights in Georgia
Georgian Church	claims rights in Armenia
ARFD	openly supports separatism

Typical demands

VIRK	
SJ NGOs	demand autonomy
Armenia	
Locals	
SJ NGOs	demand investigation
Armenia	
Locals	
SJ NGOs	demand language status
JAVAKHK	
VIRK	
Locals	
SJ NGOs	demand to retain Russian Military
JAVAKHK	
VIRK	
Locals	demand recognition of Armenian genocide
JAVAKHK	demands return of regional center to Akhalkalaki
JAVAKHK	demands Arm. history classes in schools

Typical direct action

Int. Org. Armenia Diaspora Arm. Church	care for ethnic identity
A-INFO VIRK JAVAKHK Anonymous	sow panic/spread misinformation
SJ NGOs Russia	stage provocation/intimidate
VIRK Locals JAVAKHK	organize rallies
Locals	Clash with police
VIRK Locals	launch violence
VIRK A-INFO JAVAKHK SJ NGOs	collaborate w/Russia
Georgian Government Georgian Church	carry out pressure
Georgian Government Int. Org.	carry out appeasement measures
Georgian Government	undertakes control
Georgian Government Int. Org. Civil society	carry out integration policies
VIRK SJ NGOs Locals Armenia	make concessions (cooperate with government)
Russia	makes concessions (withdraws military bases)

What do these actors typically do? (Same typical actions grouped by actors):

Georgian Government	makes anti-Russian/Armenian statements carry out pressure carry out appeasement measures undertakes control carry out integration policies
A-INFO	sow panic/spread misinformation collaborate w/Russia
Anonymous	sow panic/spread misinformation
ARFD	openly supports separatism
Arm. Church	claims rights in Georgia cares for ethnic identity
Armenia	make anti-Georgian/Turkish statements demand autonomy demand investigation care for ethnic identity cooperate with Georgian Government
Civil society	carry out integration policies
Diaspora	care for ethnic identity
Georgian Church	claims rights in Armenia carry out pressure
International Community/ Organizations	care for ethnic identity carry out appeasement measures carry out integration policies
JAVAKHK	make anti-Georgian/Turkish statements demand language status demand to retain Russian Military demand recognition of Armenian genocide demands return of regional center to Akhalkalaki demands Arm. history classes in schools sow panic/spread misinformation organize rallies
Locals	demand investigation demand language status

	demand to retain Russian Military demand recognition of Armenian genocide organize rallies Clash with police launch violence cooperate with Georgian Government
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Russia	stage provocation/intimidate makes concessions (withdraws bases)
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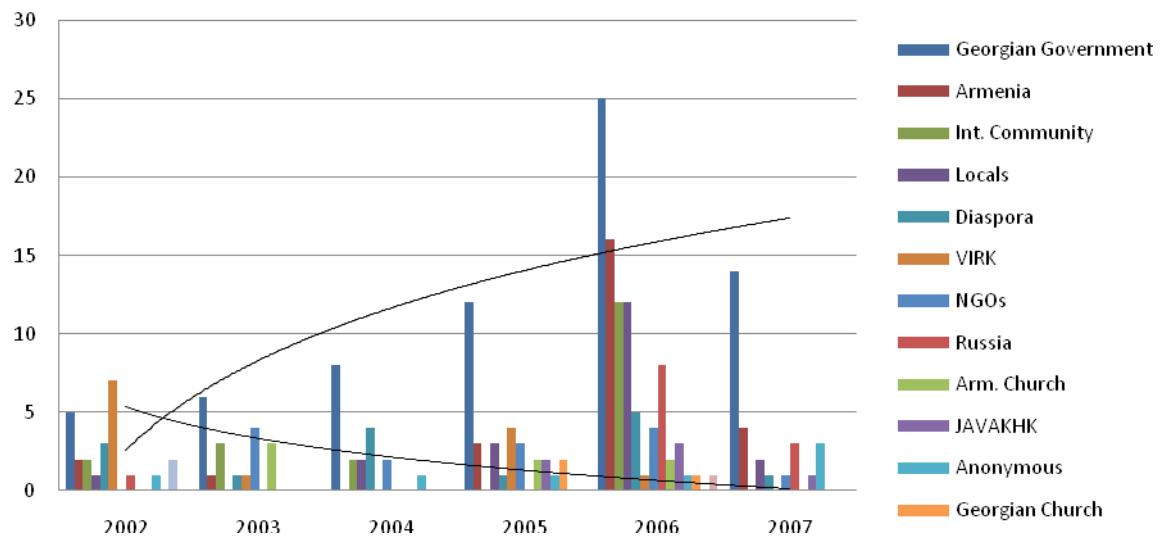
SJ NGOs	make anti-Georgian/Turkish statements demand autonomy demand investigation demand language status demand to retain Russian Military stage provocation/intimidate collaborate w/Russia cooperate with Georgian Government
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VIRK	make anti-Georgian/Turkish statements demand autonomy demand to retain Russian Military demand recognition of Armenian genocide sow panic/spread misinformation organize rallies launch violence collaborate w/Russia cooperate with Georgian Government
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Below, detailed history of SJ developments is provided from 1992 and up till today.

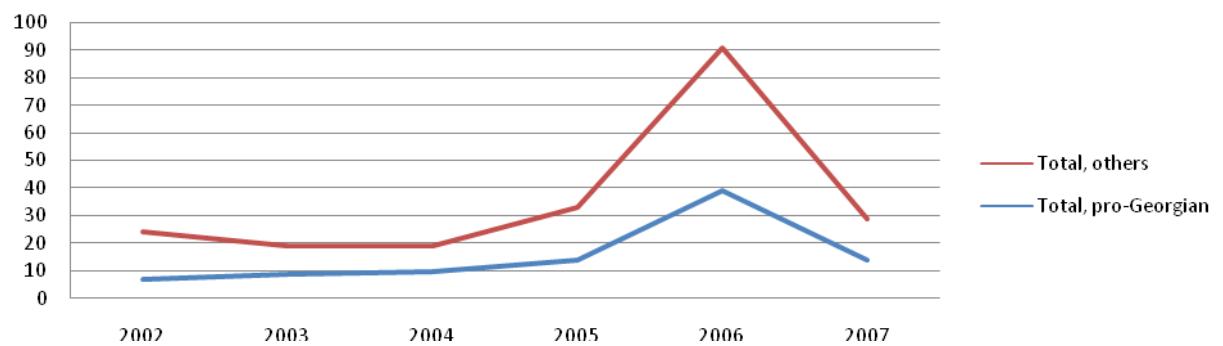
Some Statistics on actors, their actions, and interaction of forces in SJ, 2002-2007

Activity of different forces in SJ, 2002-2007

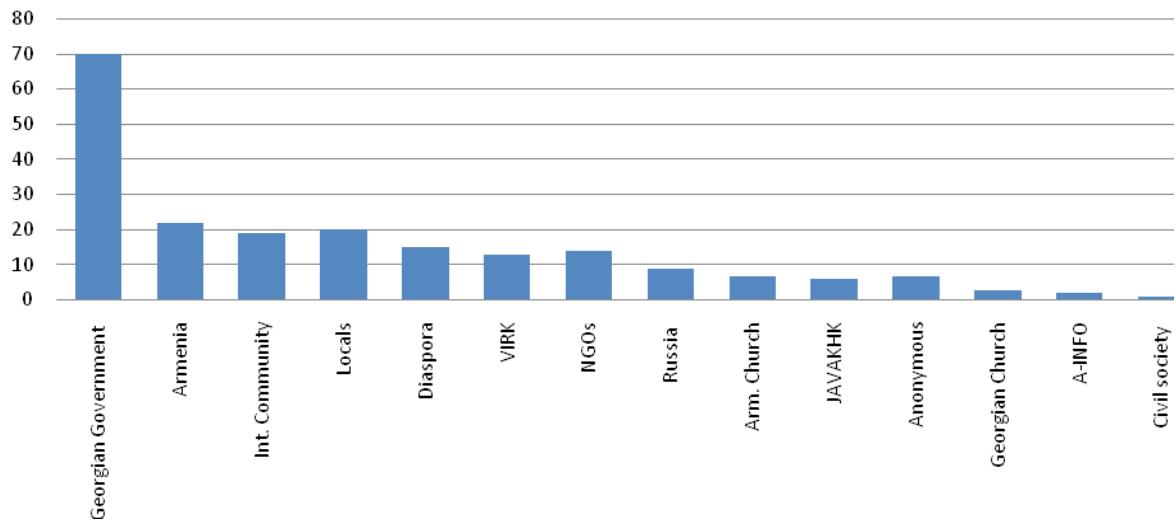


	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Georgian Government	5	6	8	12	25	14
Armenia	2	1	0	3	16	4
Int. Community	2	3	2	0	12	0
Locals	1	0	2	3	12	2
Diaspora	3	1	4	1	5	1
VIRK	7	1	0	4	1	0
NGOs	0	4	2	3	4	1
Russia	1	0	0	0	8	3
Arm. Church	0	3	0	2	2	0
JAVAKHK	0	0	0	2	3	1
Anonymous	1	0	1	1	1	3
Georgian Church	0	0	0	2	1	0
A-INFO	2	0	0	0	0	0
Civil society	0	0	0	0	1	0

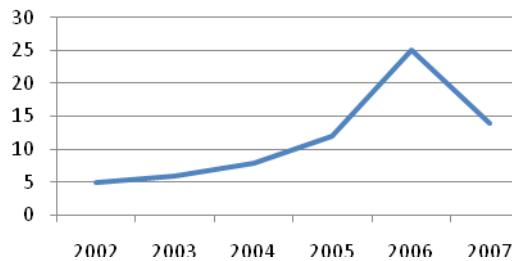
Activity of different forces in SJ, 2002-2007



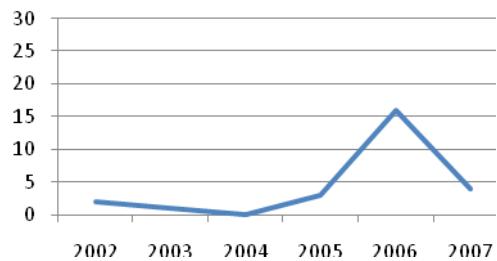
Total Activities, 2002-2008



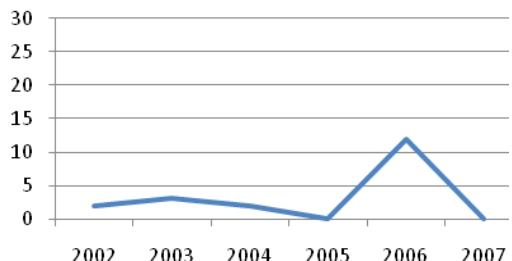
Georgian Government



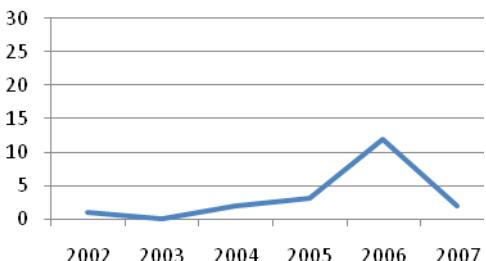
Armenia



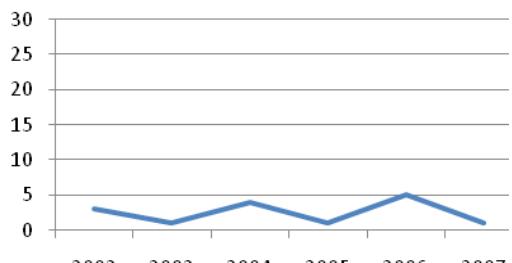
Int. Community



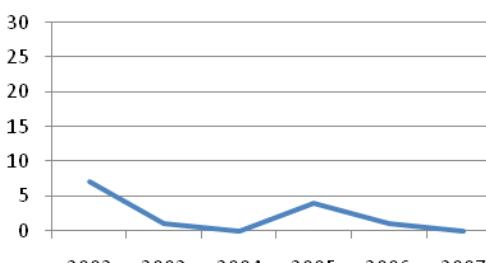
Locals

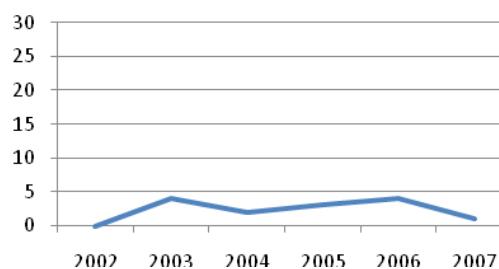
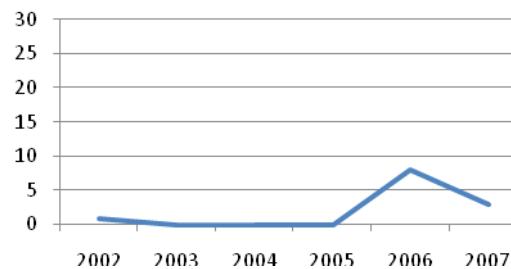
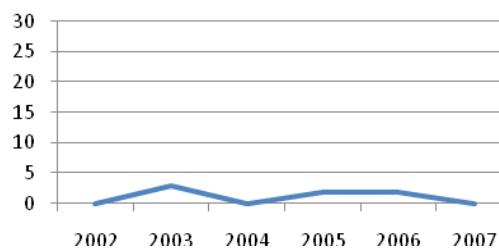
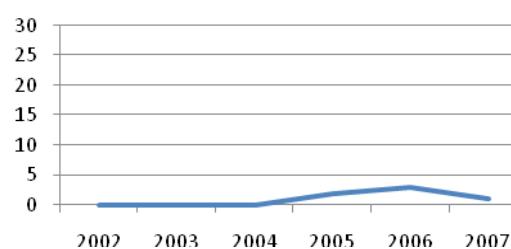
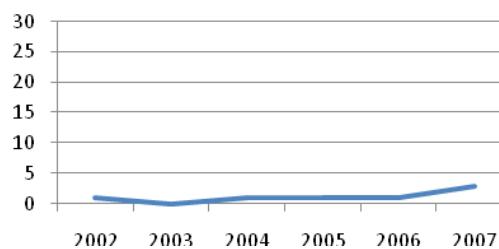
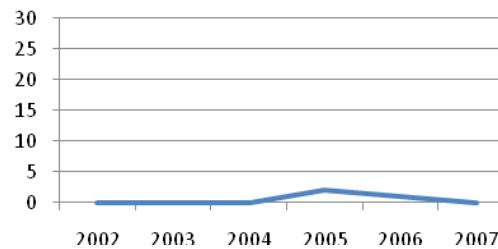
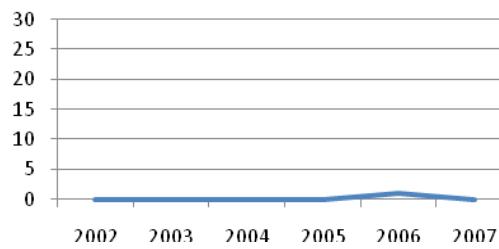
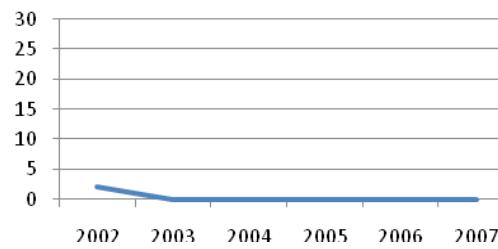


Diaspora



VIRK



NGOs**Russia****Arm. Church****JAVAKHK****Anonymous****Georgian Church****Civil society****A-INFO**

* Year 2006 has been marked with the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Akhalkalaki

History of Separatism Problem in SJ

Since 1991, when the USSR collapsed and Georgia regained independence, it failed to translate into national integrity of the newly emerged state. Gamsakhurdia administration, which produced nationalist sentiments within the nation, lacked vision and skills to tackle problems, and it had severely aggravated the situation regarding national minorities.

With the rise of national movement in Georgia, the national-popular movement Javakhk was created in 1988. Its influence rapidly grew among the local Armenians. The official goals of the organization were “preservation of Armenian cultural heritage, teaching history of Armenia in local schools, protection of national institutions and the development of the region”. **David Rstakyan** became one of the first Javakhk leaders and Chairman of the **Coordinating Council** of the public and political organizations of SJ. The goal of SJ Armenians was at least to obtain autonomy, if not to unite with Armenia. These aspirations had been supported by Moscow from the very beginning. The aim of Russian policy was to maintain control over Georgia while Yerevan tried to quell the secessionist aspirations of Armenians in Javakheti. Armenia wanted to avoid fight on two fronts and realized that in the event of conflict with Georgia, it would find itself virtually blockaded (the borders had already been sealed by Azerbaijan and Turkey). Both processes (Russia's support of the centrifugal trends in SJ and opposition of these trends by Armenia's official leadership) intensified in the subsequent years².

Reports show that the collapse of the USSR and consequent changes were little reflected on SJ. People remained preoccupied by their habitual rural life and political developments did not touch them much. Local Armenians, who are predominantly Turkish refugees of early 19th century, have developed their quasi-Georgian identity while the newer generation, because of weakness of the young Georgian state, became more oriented on further integration with their ethnic motherland.

SJ has always been different from other Georgian regions with large ethnic minority populations. While Abkhazia has always been the only motherland for ethnic Abkhazians, North Ossetia on one hand, and Armenia on the other, have been historic motherland for ethnic Ossetian and ethnic Armenian populations, forming, at the same time, main elements of their ethnic identity. But SJ Armenians also enjoyed far stronger ethnic identity and a range of external interest from Armenia, US and European Armenian diaspora, and from Russia. During soviet times and long afterwards, SJ Armenians enjoyed free access to their ethnic Capital. When Georgia acquired independence, SJ was left on its own because weak Georgian state failed to exercise effective control of the region, and Shevardnadze administration tried to avoid violent clashes and preferred to concede positions rather than escalate the situation. However, late 1980s and the rise of nationalist rhetoric by Gamsakhurdia and other nationalist leaders created very fertile grounds for centrifugal forces in SJ, just as in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The situation has much changed after 2006 (withdrawal of Russian military base from Akhalkalaki), but detention of “United Javakhk” activist Vahagn Chakhalyan, and announcement of start of Kars-Akhalkalaki railway in July 2008 have caused new tensions in the region which continue to this date.

² Ibid

Years 1990-1992

According to Liz Fuller, Radio Free Europe observer, the first ethnic clash in SJ dates back to April 1990, when an ethnic Armenian was killed in Akhaltsikhe³, but the clash did not resonate to boost separatist feelings of the locals. This is maybe because SJ did not feel any pressure from Tbilisi, and locals maintained full control of the region. Maybe the best evidence to support this argument is the history with guards of Z. Gamsakhurdia who intended to return to Tbilisi via Javakheti after having accompanied the president fleeing to Armenia after the coup in Tbilisi. Armed residents of the Akhalkalaki region did not allow them to enter their territory, and disarmed the unit.

During Gamsakhurdia's rule, the most serious conflict between Tbilisi and Akhalkalaki concerned "Prefects" – Presidential nominees to the regions: Armenians refused to accept three consecutive prefectoral candidates sent from the capital because they were Georgian. This was done in the following manner - the armed crowd gathered in front of the administrative building in Akhalkalaki, and did not let candidates from Tbilisi into the building. The protests were organized by Javakhk. Before Tbilisi agreed to make some concessions, the Provisional Council of Representatives governed the region. In February 1991 each of the 64 villages of the Akhalkalaki region elected their representative and eight representatives were elected by the city. Of these the Council of 24 people was created. The Presidium of seven (including one Georgian) was the working body of the Council. The Council was unconstitutional organ and **David Rstakyan** and **Tigran Karakhanyan** led the movement.

Year 1994

In Shevardnadze's early years in power, institution of Presidential Representatives in the regions was introduced. The territories settled by the Armenians were included in the region of Samtskhe-Javakheti embracing the historical Meskheti and Javakheti. Javakhk perceived the creation of the Samtskhe-Javakheti region as aimed at counterbalancing the Armenian majority in Javakheti, since in Samtskhe-Javakheti Armenians no longer represent the overwhelming majority. They thought that the change threatened the rights of Armenians. Dissatisfaction was also caused by the fact a Georgian was appointed as the State Representative which was reminiscent of the conflict involving the prefects. Many members of the Assembly believed that under such circumstances declaration of independence was the only alternative. However, thanks to constructive position of Armenia, these tensions did not escalate ever further.

Year 1996

New intensification of tensions started in April, when Javakhk association demanded that ethnic Armenian battalion be created in Georgian Army, for conscripts from Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki (SJ towns with majority of ethnic Armenian population). The third demand was to stop plans regarding Marabda (Georgian Kvemo Kartli region) – Kars (Turkish province) railway project which was signed by Eduard Shevardnadze and Suleiman Demirel. Clearly, the railway would alter geopolitics of the region, with increasing economic and political interaction with Turkey. Javakhk demands can be divided on two parts by type: identity-related (autonomy, special Armenian unit within Georgian Army), and political (opposition to Turkish railway). While the last cited demand was also declared as identity-based (amidst traditional Turkophobia of Armenians), later developments suggest that Javakhk activities had much to do with outside forces. In June 1996, Armenia's Ter-Petrosyan visited the region together with Shevardnadze. Locals staged protests outside the building where the talks were planned and over the meeting with Javakhk leader, locals voiced the same demands to Ter-Petrosyan. The event was widely televised by Russian NTV channel.⁴

Year 1997

Javakhk members began to collect signatures under the document of the following content: Dear Javakhks! The Coordinating Council of the public and political organizations of Javakheti, in accordance with Paragraph 1 of Article 67 of the Constitution of Georgia (no less than 30 thousand electors have the right of legislative initiative), are organizing the collection of signatures for the discussion in the Parliament of the following issues:

³ Liz Fuller, *Armenian President's Georgia Visit Highlights Tensions*, OMRI Analytical Briefs, 07 June, 1996

⁴ Liz Fuller, *Georgia's Armenian Community Again Raises Question Of Autonomy*, OMRI, 05 June, 1996

1. discontinuation of the process of creation of the “anti-constitutional” region of Samtskhe-Javakheti;
2. upon the passage of the chapter of the Constitution on the territorial arrangement of the country, to grant Javakheti the respective status of the administrative-territorial unit within the framework of the Georgian Constitution.

Javakhk failed to accomplish the process of collecting signatures, because, as David Rstakyan told to a Polish researcher, the process was obstructed by police and special services.⁵

Year 1998

A major military incident was averted without casualties. Georgian Defense Ministry had scheduled military exercises in SJ and had made announcements regarding the maneuvers on state television for the past month. A brigade of Georgian forces nearing the Akhalkalaki region were met by surprise by a band of 25 armed Armenians who surrounded the Georgian forces and demanded their retreat from the area. The Georgian military exercises were scheduled to include the participation of Russian troops in that area, 70 percent of whom are Armenian. However, Russian military representatives did not attend the exercises.

While the Georgian forces were surrounded by the Armenian gunmen, a group of unidentified people raided the Russian military weapons depot, located in Akhalkalaki and have looted the arsenal. Reports indicated that the depot was **not guarded** (?!) at the time of the alleged raid.

Meanwhile, residents in Akhalkalaki were reportedly told that the Georgian forces were entering the region with the aim of forcibly evacuating Armenian residents from the region. Also, a bomb exploded at the Akhalkalaki regional government building at night. No casualties were reported. Georgian Defense Ministry immediately withdrew its forces from the region. Georgian police arrested two alleged gunmen involved in the incident, while the remainder managed to escape.⁶

Year 1999

There were two hot issues in SJ: (1) limited Georgian military presence, confined to patrolling the Javakheti section of the Turkish border, still caused frustration of locals, and (2) prospects for the withdrawal of Russian military base in Akhalkalaki, because the obligation was signed by Russia's Yeltsin on OSCE Istanbul summit. The same year, Javakhk members formed the new **radical political party "Virk"**, D. Rstakyan was among the leaders again. The Georgian Justice Ministry refused to register the party citing its "regional" character.⁷

Year 2001

The major issue was possible return of so called “Meskhetian Turks” in SJ. These people were deported by Stalin from SJ to Central Asia in 1943. One of Georgia's commitments to the Council of Europe is return of Meskhetian Turks between 2002 and 2012. However, the issue has been postponed many times, partly because of severe opposition from Georgia's Armenian minority.⁸

⁵ Voitsekh Guretski, *the Question of Javakheti*, Caucasian Regional Studies, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 1998.

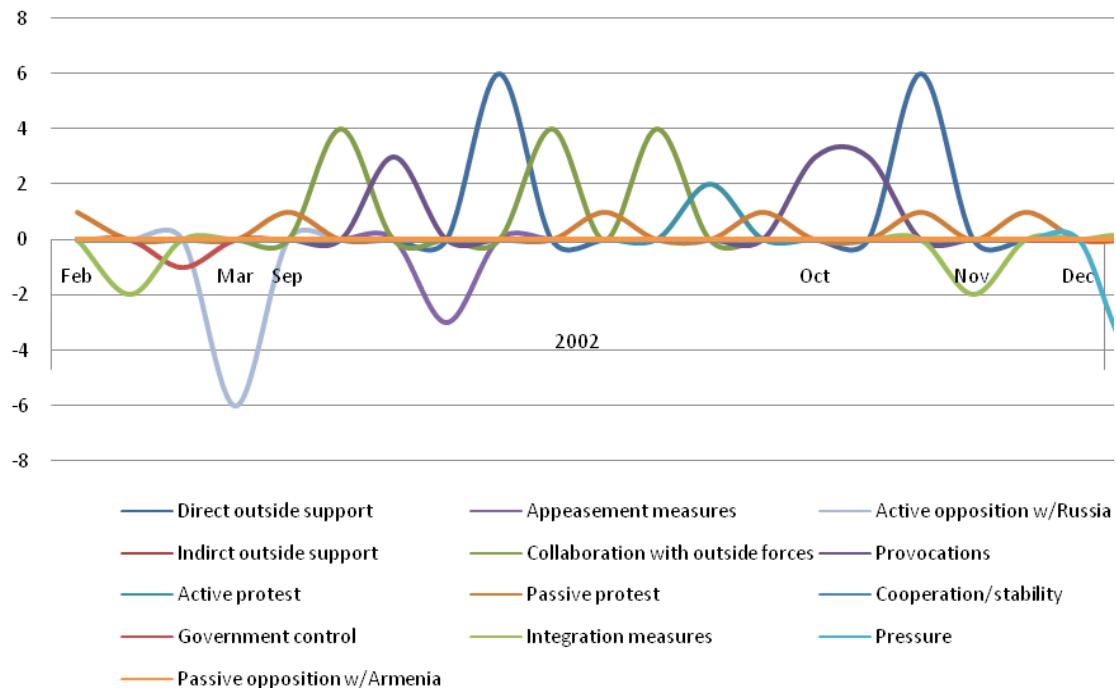
⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: *Violent Incident In Javakhk Averted*, by Noyan Tapan, Aug. 24, 1998,

⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: *Armenian Enclave in Georgia Facing Extinction*, by E. Danielyan, Aug. 26, 1999

⁸ AZG Armenian Daily #231: *Armenians of Georgia Against Return of Meskhetian Turks*: Dec. 15, 2001

Year 2002

SJ Reality, 2002



February:

- **VIRK Demands – retain Russian Military base:** Mels Torosian (Virk co-chair) declared that Russian military base is of physical security importance to SJ Armenians.⁹
- **Central Government takes action - integration:** Tbilisi State University Branch opened in Akhalkalaki to include faculties of Armenian and Georgian philology, law, foreign languages and Economy.¹⁰
- **Central Government action – control:** Rubik Abajian was appointed as the new military commissioner of the region. Abajian was the brother of the local police chief. As a result, first time after the collapse of the USSR, 50 young ethnic Armenian men were enlisted in Georgian Army.¹¹

March:

- **Central Government takes anti-Russian stance:** In SJ, near the Turkish-Georgian border, joint military exercises of Georgian and Turkish border troops started on March 19. Novosti news agency, quoting a source of Georgian border troops' headquarters, informs that Abkhazia border units of Georgian state border service and the 25th regiment of Turkish armed forces participate in the military exercises.¹²
- **VIRK splits apart:** Following the March 2002 congress of the **Javakhk People's Movement** (JPM) and electing Norik Karapetian as the Movement's president, the organization has split into two parts.¹³

⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Military base is first of all of physical security importance for Javakhk Armenians, Dec. 17, 2002

¹⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Tbilisi State University Branch Opened in Akhalkalaki, Feb. 17, 2002

¹¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Young Men Forced to Military Service in Akhalkalaki, Feb. 17, 2002

¹² JAVAKHK.COM: *Georgian-Turkish Military Exercises in Samtskhe-Javakhk*, from AZG Armenian Daily, Mar. 20, 2002

¹³ JAVAKHK.COM: *Javakhk NGO Founded*, Feb. 25, 2004

- **Diaspora takes action:** AYF-YOARF Eastern has formed a social and educational center “Javakhk Youth Initiative”. Leaders of AYF-YOARF Eastern laid out plans to purchase and renovate a youth center in Akhalkalaki. The building is located across from City Hall and includes a large hall and many rooms, and serve as headquarters.¹⁴
- **VIRK Collaborates with Russia:** Public rally was held in Akhalkalaki to protest the removal of the Russian military base. Political organizations have called people to take part in the protest rally. Leaders restated demands for Javakheti autonomy.¹⁵
- **Anonymous provocation:** Over the night to September 25, pro-Russian and anti-Turkish leaflets appeared on the walls of the administrative buildings in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda. “We, the Avengers of Javakhk, will no longer tolerate any anti-Armenian act by the chauvinistic Georgian authorities, and our response will be powerful and won't miss its target” – read the leaflets.¹⁶
- **Central Government takes action - appeasement:** The government has proposed SJ reconstruction plan, envisioning repair of roads, schools, hospitals and other public facilities. Also, the Health and Social Care Ministry promised to repay 1.3 million pension debts, Energy Ministry declared that there were plans to launch a new hydro energy plant on the river Taparvan, Agriculture Ministry pledged to attract new investments and allocate priority loans for the region, and education ministry promised to launch Georgian language teaching programs in schools.¹⁷
- **Russian intimidation:** Putin blamed Georgia of hiding Chechen guerrillas and said he might undertake attack.
- **VIRK collaborates with Russia:** Government programs were raised in response to Putin's threats to attack Georgia¹⁸ and immediately intensified separatist movements in SJ, led by “Virk” radical movement. Young locals revealed more sympathy to the organization and its goals – stated as autonomy for Javakheti (part of SJ).
- **VIRK demands autonomy:** According to D. Rstakyan, “It is just a matter of simple logic: the Abkhaz are not Georgians and they have autonomy, the Ossetians are not Georgians and they have autonomy, neither we, Armenians, are Georgians, but we have no autonomy. So, we think our demand is quite natural. Georgia should bear the idea that we will achieve our goal quite soon”. Asked what the grounds for such optimism were, he responded: “Our truth and the fact is that we are backed by many various countries. We bank on these states, although I will not specify which countries they are.” Asked whether the demands were in response to the prospect of Russian military bases leaving Akhalkalaki, he answered: **VIRK collaborates with Russia:** “Russian military base has been operating in Akhalkalaki for a long time. Thousands of local residents are employed at the base” **VIRK spreads misinformation:** “Besides, I have information that Georgia is going to replace Russian bases with the Turkish ones. We are categorically against it”... During interview, Rstakyan repeated Putin's demands that “Chechen guerrillas should be wiped out from Georgia.” Asked if he had relations with Georgian political leaders, Rstakyan said that he did have some relations but refrained to provide names, adding that these were the political forces who believed the relations with Russia should have been restored.¹⁹
- **Locals demand - language status:** Statement of Georgian PM that Georgian should be an official language for all regions of Georgia, is perceived by ethnic Armenians as chauvinistic. Ethnic Armenian MP supports

¹⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: AYF-YOARF Eastern US Launches Campaign to Assist Youth in Javakhk, Sep. 06, 2002

¹⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: Public Rally to be Held in Javakhk September 12, Sep. 10, 2002

¹⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Protest Leaflets Appear in Javakhk, Sep. 25, 2002

¹⁷ Armenpress News Agency: Armenians in Javakhk Doubtful about Government Development Plan, Sep 23, 2002

¹⁸ BBC: Putin Ups Georgia Strike Warnings, Sep 12, 2002

¹⁹ Georgian Times: Armenian separatists threaten Georgians, by Nino Zaridze, Oct 1, 2002

the idea that national languages should be used in SJ and if needed, documents could be translated into Georgian.²⁰

October:

- **A-INFO supports Russian information:** A-INFO declares that there are Chechen guerrillas hiding in Akhaltsikhe²¹
- **A-INFO sows panic:** A-INFO draw attention to buying of 20 former Armenian houses by the Georgian administration for Georgian settlers, stating that the “long-term goal of this plan is to encourage local Armenians to sell their houses and move out of the province--thus decrease the overall number of the Armenian population”.²²
- **Diaspora takes action:** ARS Akhalkalaki branch donated \$55,000 worth medical equipment to the Akhalkalaki regional hospital. Another \$5,000 worth of medical equipment was given to a medical diagnostic center. ARS also announced plans to donate more medical equipment worth \$85,000 to this diagnostic center. Representatives of Armenian Church and Georgian administration participated in the event.²³
- **Armenia supports separatism:** Armenian National Assembly Speaker Armen Khachatrian declared that he supported the idea of SJ sovereignty

November:

- **Int. Org. takes action:** OSCE organized the seminar in Tbilisi named “Integration and Development Programs of the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region”. Rolf Ekeus, OSCE High Commissioner for ethnic minorities participated in the seminar.
- **VIRK demands autonomy:** Virk issues the statement regarding the seminar, where Virk thanked for the opportunity of participation in the seminar and claimed that Georgian government has no social-economic vision for the region’s development, and reiterated demands for the Javakheti autonomy status.²⁴

December:

- **Armenia supports stability:** On December 17, Armenian President Kocharian met with the leadership of the Hzor Hayrenik party of Armenia. Vardan Vardanian, chairman of the party, introduced his party's plans and clearly stressed that the nearest Diaspora problems are a priority for his party. Robert Kocharian in turn said, that "The country needs a chance to develop in stability."²⁵
- **Central Government takes action - pressure:** On the early morning of December 15, the Cultural Center of Akhalkalaki caught on fire. The building which was erected in 1910 and included the regional children's library, completely burned down destroying the entire collection of books. Speaking about the possible causes of the fire, the director of the Center **Haig Rstakyan**, dismissed the official version that an electrical powerline shortage as the cause of the blaze; according to him it was nothing but political coercion against **his brother David Rstakyan**, the co-chairman of Virk party.²⁶

²⁰ JAVAHKH.com: Georgian Deputy Makes Chauvinistic Statement, Sep. 25, 2002

²¹ JAVAHKH.COM: A-Info reaffirms its report as Georgian authorities dismiss it, Oct. 02, 2002

²² JAVAHKH.com: Armenian Houses Bought For Georgian Settlers In Akhalkalak, Oct. 23, 2002

²³ JAVAHKH.COM: ARS donates equipments to Javakhk Armenians, Oct. 08, 2002

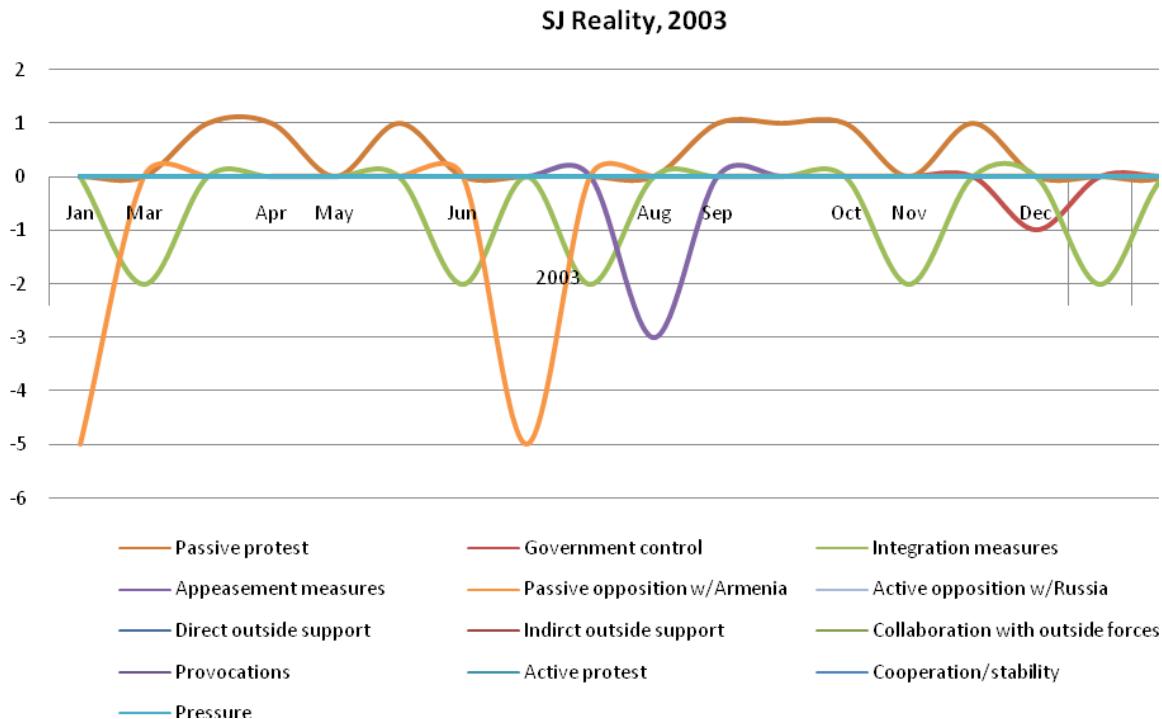
²⁴ JAVAHKH.COM: The Virk Political Party Issues Statement, Nov. 20, 2002

²⁵ JAVAHKH.COM: Kocharian meets with Hzor Hayrenik leadership, Dec. 17, 2002

²⁶ JAVAHKH.COM: Fire Destroys Cultural Center of Akhalkalak, Dec. 18, 2002

- **Int. Org. takes action:** UN sponsored discussion was held between SJ Georgian and Armenian NGOs and those of Meskhetian Turks. Georgians and Armenians rejected the possibility for Meskhetian Turk's resettlement in SJ.²⁷
- **Diaspora takes action:** The Press secretary of Washington, DC – based ANCA, Elizabeth Chouldjian, visited Akhalkalak on December 20 and 21. During the visit she met with representatives of NGOs — recipients of US government grants, as well as grants from other foreign countries and various international sources. During these meetings, the ANC press secretary became acquainted with the NGOs activities.

²⁷ JAVAHKH.COM: Georgian and Armenian organizations of Samtskhe-Javakhk oppose to return of Meskhetian Turks, Dec. 13, 2002



January:

- **Central Government takes anti-Russian stance:** Georgian Foreign Ministry intensified negotiations on Russian military base withdrawal within the period of three years.

March:

- **Int. Org. takes action:** London-based “**Safer World**” Caucasus coordinator visited SJ to meet with local NGOs. The goal was to find out the level of weapons’ concentration in the population. A-INFO reported that “Stephen Gettins became assured that there were no weapons and that local youth was not preparing new ethnic conflict”. However, no statement is quoted by the source.²⁸
- **VIRK demands autonomy:** The presidium of the Virk Party has condemned the statement by Artiush Hambartsumian, member of the party's presidium and the chairman of the Akhalkalaki district administration, made during a session of the Georgian Government; Hambartsumyan has said that Armenians "have settled in Javakheti three centuries ago. In addition, Hambartsumian has said that journalists should not raise an issue of autonomy for Javakhk."²⁹

April:

- **Arm. Church takes action:** New TV receiver was stationed in the village of Tamala in Aspindza region (SJ) for locals to watch Armenian TV programs,³⁰ by the help of Archbishop **Mesrop Ashchian**.

May:

²⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: No Weapons Detected in Akhalkalaki, Mar. 10, 2003

²⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Virk Deplores Statement by Hambartsumyan, Mar. 10, 2003

³⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Armenians in Tamala Get a Chance to Watch Armenian TV Programs, Apr. 03, 2003

- **NGOs cooperate with Government:** A gathering of representatives of the Armenian communities of Georgia was organized on May 21 at the Griboyedov Russian Theater in Tbilisi. About 600 people participated in the gathering who made a decision to support President Shevardnadze's political platform in the upcoming parliamentary elections in Georgia.³¹
- **Arm. Church takes action:** Archbishop Mesrop Ashchian handed copies of Narekatsi's "Book of Grief" to 250 graduates of the Javakhk secondary schools. Earlier he had organized a pilgrimage to the historic sites of Javakhk.³²

June:

- **Central Government takes action – integration:** Georgian Parliament discussed the Law on Passports and Birth Certificates. The law has been adopted in the first reading a month ago. According to new regulation, all birth certificates in Georgia would state "Georgian" for nationality (understood as citizenship). In soviet times, passports stated ethnicity of the owner, while Georgian administration now preferred to state only citizenship. Armenian A-INFO news agency appeared concerned with the issue.³³
- **Central Government takes anti-Russian stance:** The construction of the BTC pipeline, launched on May 23, was accompanied by massive protests from the population. Residents of Armenian villages have blocked the way of the American construction workers in Tetri-Tsghora.³⁴
- **Int. Org. takes action:** The UNDP office in Akhalkalaki has started to accept proposals from NGO's operating in the SJ. The projects should have dealt with economy, environment, social security, culture, education and science.³⁵

August:

- **Central Government takes action – appeasement:** Gela Kvaratskhelia replaced Teimuraz Mosiashvili on the position of Presidential Representative in the region. Armenian MP Van Baiburdyan said Kvaratskhelia's position toward the issue of **Turkish Meskhetians** coincided with that of the SJ population.³⁶

September:

- **NGOs demand autonomy:** SJ Armenian organizations called for ethnic Armenian unity before the parliamentary elections scheduled in November, to support the political force that would "raise and support" Armenian issues in the Parliament.³⁷
- **NGOs demand autonomy:** Council of Armenian Organizations of SJ has formulated provisions based on which the ethnic Armenians would vote for candidates and parties in the upcoming parliamentary election in Georgia. Akunk and A-Info unions of Akhalkalaki, the Sports and Culture Union of Javakheti, the Lernashkhar Union of Ninotsminda and the Charles Aznavour Culture Union of Akhaltsikhe have undersigned the statement. All the demands related to autonomy status and preserving ethnic identity of the SJ Armenian population.³⁸

³¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian Authorities Organize Gathering, May 25, 2003

³² JAVAKHK.COM: Archbishop Mesrop Ashchian keeps helping Javakhk, May 30, 2003

³³ JAVAKHK.COM: Appartheid : Discrimination continues in Georgia, reprint from A-INFO: Jun 06, 2003

³⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline Raises Protests, Jun. 06, 2003

³⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: UNDP Offers Cooperation in Javakhk, Jun. 26, 2003

³⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Shevardnadze appoints new representative to Javakhk, Aug. 25, 2003

³⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Armenians unite before parliamentary elections in Georgia, Sep. 17, 2003

³⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Ethnic Armenians formulate their expectations from Georgian political parties, Sep. 30, 2003

October:

- **Arm. Church takes action:** Primate of Armenian Church visited SJ. He conducted a service at the St. Grigor Lusavorcih church and declared that it is necessary to found women's and youth organizations under the Armenian Church sponsorship to strengthen the traditional bases of the religion.³⁹

November:

- **Central Government takes action – integration.** Three ethnic Armenians were elected in November 2 elections. One from Akhalkalaki (**Hamlet Shakhbedyan**, 50%), one from Ninotsminda (**Henzel Mkoyan**, 60%), and from Tsalka (**Haik Melkonyan**, 50%).⁴⁰
- **Diaspora takes action:** APS-sponsored diagnostic center opened in Akhalkalaki.⁴¹
- On November 23, Rose Revolution took part in Tbilisi.

December:

- **Central Government takes control:** After revolution, old cadres were released from their positions. On Nov. 29, they organized demonstrations in Ninotsminda, demanding resignation of the head of the Ninotsminda district, **Rafik Arzumanyan**. **Clashes occurred:** After the organizers of the demonstration called for disorder, the police forces were brought from Akhalkalaki under the command of chief of police **Mkhitar Abajian**, and they broke up the rally.⁴²
- **Int. Org. takes action:** German Ambassador to Georgia Uwe Schramm made a visit to SJ. He attended the ceremony of opening of classroom of the German language in the Akhaltsikhe branch of the Tbilisi State University. The German federal government has provided equipment and literature for the classroom.⁴³
- **Armenia supports stability:** Deputy Chief of Armenian Police Hovhannes Hunanian and Deputy Interior Minister of Georgia Gia Asatiani met with the local authorities of Javakheti in Akhalkalaki. They discussed issues related to maintaining order in the region during the Georgian presidential elections to be held on January 5.⁴⁴
- **NGOs demand autonomy:** On the eve of presidential elections in Georgia, group of Javakhk NGOs made an appeal to the country's acting president, Nino Burjanadze, to grant autonomy to Javakheti region.⁴⁵

³⁹ JAVAHKH.COM: Armenian Church Primate of Georgia visits Akhaltsikhe, Oct. 07, 2003

⁴⁰ JAVAHKH.COM: Three Armenians elected to Georgian Parliament, Nov. 16, 2003

⁴¹ JAVAHKH.COM: Up-to-date medical center opened in Javakhk, Nov. 21, 2003

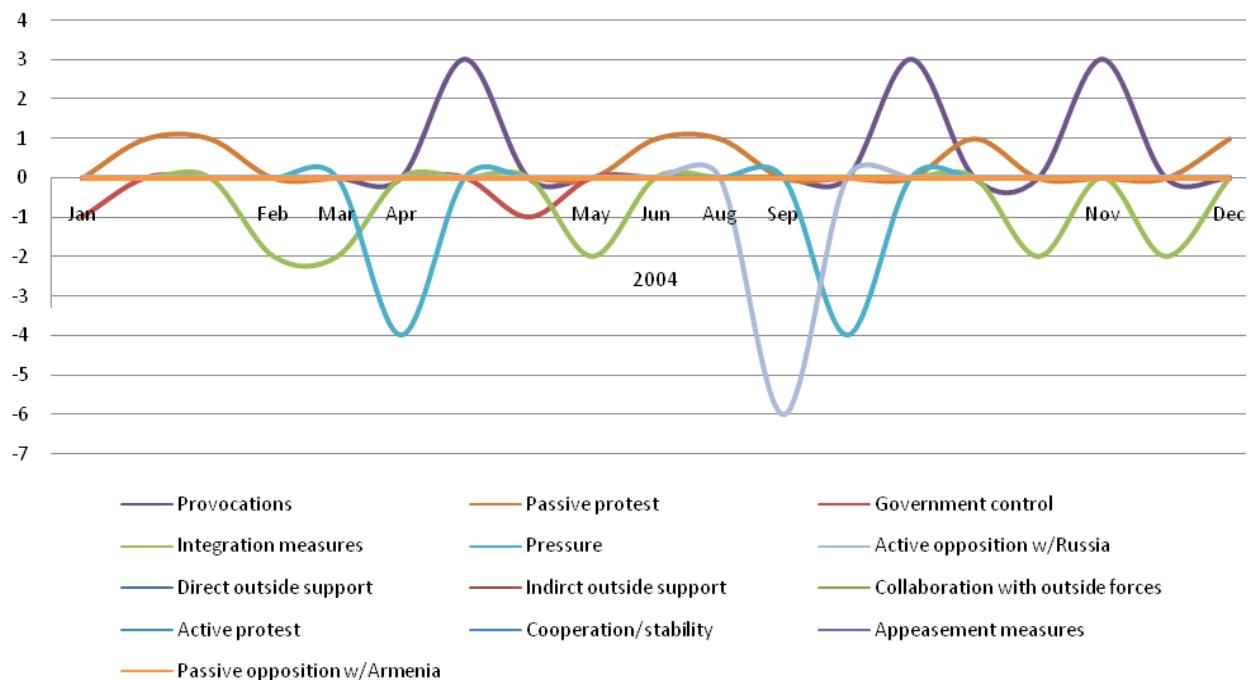
⁴² JAVAHKH.COM: Demonstrators demand resignation of local government in Ninotsminda, Dec. 01, 2003

⁴³ JAVAHKH.COM: German Ambassador to Georgia visits Javakhk, Dec. 23, 2003

⁴⁴ JAVAHKH.COM: Georgian and Armenian authorities work together in Javakhk, Dec. 24, 2003

⁴⁵ JAVAHKH.COM: AUTONOMY: Armenian organizations of Javakhk urge Georgian leadership to implement self-governing, Jan. 08, 2004

SJ Reality, 2004



January:

- **Central Government takes control:** When new administration occupied the office after January 5 presidential elections, Georgian Armenians attached much hopes to Saakashvili. Commentators said this was normal since Armenian minority have always been voting for the incumbent government.⁴⁶
- **NGOs demand autonomy:** Group of Javakhk NGOs made an appeal to the country's new president, M. Saakashvili, to grant autonomy to Javakheti region.⁴⁷
- **Diaspora takes action:** ANCA held a series of meetings with White House and State Department officials, as well as the Georgian ambassador to the United States, over the past two weeks to inquire about the current situation in Georgia, to share the ANCA concerns regarding the Armenian-populated Javakheti region in Southern Georgia and to discuss the needs of the Armenian community in Georgia. These meetings, which were all held in a positive and constructive atmosphere, coincide with the January 16th letter of the Council of Armenian NGOs to the newly-elected President Saakashvili.⁴⁸

February:

- **Int. Org. takes action:** Jonathan Wetley and Tom Trier of the **Berlin University Strategic Studies Center** visited Akhalkalaki on February 24 to found a branch of the Center in Akhalkalaki which will be studying the relations between the region and the Georgian central government. Dr. Wetley said founding such a branch in Akhalkalaki would greatly contribute to improving the relations between Javakhk and Tbilisi.⁴⁹
- Former president of the JPM, **Stepan Hakobian** was elected as head of the Javakhk NGO.⁵⁰

March:

⁴⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Rating of Saakashvili increased in Javakhk 100 times within 60 days, Jan. 08, 2004

⁴⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: AUTONOMY: Javakhk Armenians expect Saakashvili to grant autonomy to Javakhk, Jan. 19, 2004

⁴⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: ANCA discusses situation in Javakhk with senior U.S. officials, Jan. 27, 2004

⁴⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: German Center established in Javakhk, Feb. 25, 2004

⁵⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Javakhk NGO Founded, Feb. 25, 2004

- **Central Government takes action – integration:** Five ethnic Armenians were elected in the Georgian parliament. Two of them were elected under proportional system, another three under the single-mandate system. There were six ethnic Armenians in the previous parliament. **Melik Raisian** and **Van Baiburdyan**, included in the ruling party list, have been re-elected. **Henzel Mkoyan**, **Hamlet Movsisian** and **Haik Miltonian** have been elected under the single-mandate system.⁵¹

April:

- **Central Government takes action – pressure:** On the initiative of several ethnic Greeks of the Holeank village of Georgia's Tsalka region several dozens of Ajars and Svans were brought to the village for permanent residence, resulting in outrage by ethnic Armenians of the neighboring Odzni and Gushchi villages. **Clashes occur:** Armenians beat up one of the plan's organizers, a Greek resident of Holeank.⁵² It is interesting the Armenian flag has been waved during the clash.⁵³ **Central Government takes control:** 150-strong special troops were deployed to prevent further clashes.⁵⁴ There were many reports that Armenians were armed but the claim was officially declined by the authorities.

May:

- **Int. Org. takes action:** A conference to discuss economic integration of the South Caucasus was held on May 26-27 in Trabzon, Turkey, organized by the **European Union**. Head of Akhalkalaki ditrict, Artur Yeremian, and Ninotsminda district head Rafik Arzumanian were among the forum participants. The representatives of Javakhk raised the issue of improving the roads in Javakhk, saying it would contribute largely to the integration process.

June:

- **Diaspora takes action:** The students of Javakhk schools won the grand prix in the contest titled "I am Armenian". The contest was sponsored by the Javakhk branch of the **Armenian Relief Society (ARS)**.⁵⁵

August:

- **Central Government takes control:** Ethnic Georgian was appointed the prosecutor of SJ.⁵⁶

September:

- **Central Government takes anti-Russian stance:** BP announces plans to conclude BTC construction by October.⁵⁷
- **Central Government takes action - pressure:** The clash took part between the "Kmara" young activists and locals, **Clashes occur:** when they visited SJ to campaign there.⁵⁸
- **Diaspora takes action:** Two new Armenian schools were built in SJ by the support of **Moscow-based SJ-native ethnic Armenian businessmen Mkrtich Okroyan and Ashot Tashchian**.⁵⁹
- **Central Government takes action – integration:** New textbooks of Georgian history were introduced in the Armenian school of SJ.⁶⁰

⁵¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Five ethnic Armenians elected in Georgian Parliament, Mar. 31, 2004

⁵² JAVAKHK.COM: Resettlement of criminals in Tsalka fails, Apr. 28, 2004

⁵³ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian squashed Armenian flag, May 13, 2004

⁵⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Criminal investigation into Tsalka clash launched, May 13, 2004

⁵⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: ARS awards prizes in Javakhk schools, Jun 02, 2004

⁵⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Ethnic Georgian prosecutor to be appointed in Armenian-populated region, Aug. 12, 2004

⁵⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: BP Resolute, Sep. 14 2004

⁵⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Clash may have provoked by Georgian authorities, Sep. 14, 2004

⁵⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Two new schools built in Javakhk, Sep. 30, 2004

⁶⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Javakhk Armenians Complain Of Georgia's "Educational" Policy, Sep. 30, 2004

November:

- **Anonymous – provocation:** A fire broke out early in the morning of November 3 at the Armenian school in Tsalka district. Police said the fire was caused by the negligence of the drunk workers renovating the school building. The locals, however, say there were no workers at the school after 5 p.m. A criminal investigation has been launched.⁶¹
- **Central Government takes action – integration:** President's representative in SJ said that a number of important events would be organized in the region. The presidential representative pledged to brief the media and the local community on a regular basis on relations between the company BP and locals. He also promised to focus on the developments in the customs and transport spheres.⁶²

December:

- **NGOs demand autonomy:** The first public conference of SJ arranged by the Council of Public Organizations of the region was held in Akhalkalaki. The conference was dedicated to cultural and language issues as well as to the problems of the local self-government. The conference was held under the slogan of "Integration but not merging".⁶³

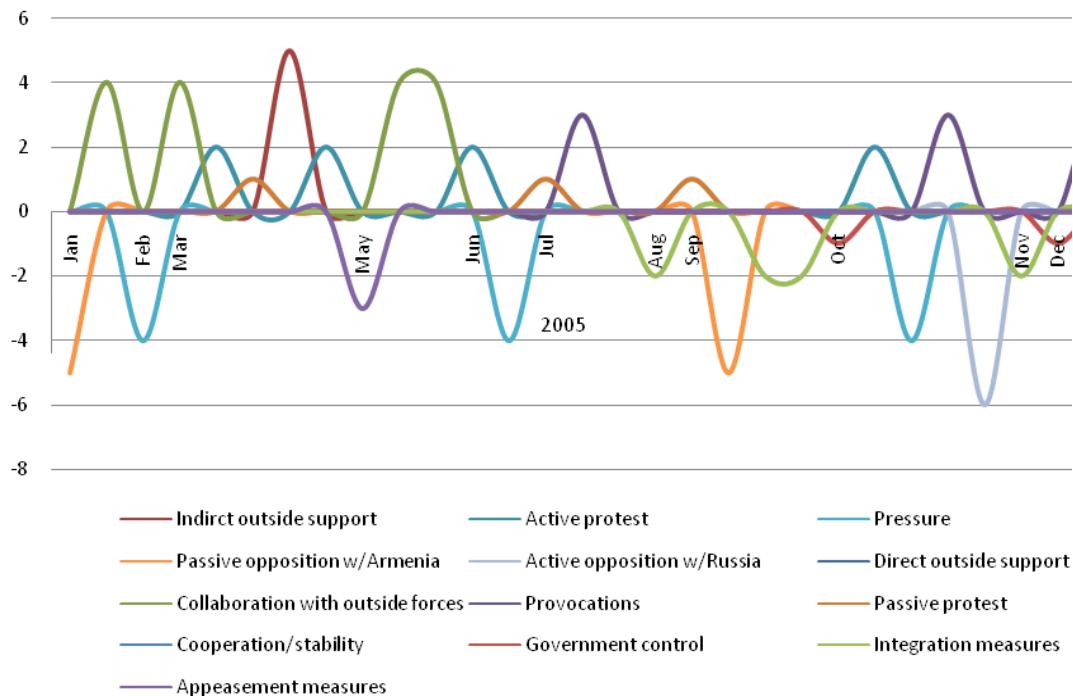
⁶¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Fire breaks out at Dashbash school, Nov. 04, 2004

⁶² JAVAKHK.COM: Envoy vows to implement "serious" projects in Georgia's Armenian-populated area, Nov. 05, 2004

⁶³ JAVAKHK.COM: First public conference of samtskhe-javakhetia to be held in akhalkalak december 11, Dec. 12, 2004

Year 2005

SJ Reality, 2005



January:

- **Central Government takes anti-Russian stance:** SJ Armenians raise concerns about plans to pave Kars-Akhalkalaki railway. Head of the **Democratic Alliance of United Javakheti, Vahagn Chakhalyan**, threatened that Armenians living in Javakheti would not allow the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway to be built. Chakhalyan listed three main reasons why Javakheti residents do not approve of this project: "(1) Kars-Akhalkalaki railway will raise Turkey's profile in Javakheti, including the possible stationing of Turkish military forces in the region under the guise of protecting communications. (2) Along with strengthening Turkey's position in the region, the railway project could also lay the groundwork for the resettlement of Meskhetian Turks in Javakheti. (3) This project vividly aims to reinforce Armenia's economic isolation and to exclude it from reaping the benefits of the establishment of a trans-Caucasian transport corridor."
- **NGOs take pro-Armenian/Russian stance:** According to Chakhalyan, instead of connecting Kars to Akhalikalaki, the railway should run from Tbilisi, through the Armenian town of Giumri and then on to Kars. "Only the maintenance of an Armenian Javakheti will be able to protect the Armenian republic from the catastrophic results brought on by the siege of Turkish ethnic elements."⁶⁴

February:

- **Georgian Church takes action – pressure:** Javakh Union claimed that the tomb with Georgian inscriptions was brought in Armenian Church in Tbilisi, and condemned the fact of "Georgianization" of Armenian cultural heritage.⁶⁵

March:

- **VIRK takes pro-Armenian stance:** David Rstakyan spoke in Radio Liberty against the withdrawal of Russian military base in Akhalkalaki. He said it would change the balance of powers in the region.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: The railway as a political tool for sowing regional paranoia, Jan. 05, 2005

⁶⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: Javakhk Union concerned over recent incident in Tbilisi, Feb. 17, 2005

⁶⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Rstakyan-Withdrawal would be a catastrophe for Javakhk Armenians, Mar. 11, 2005

- **VIRK organizes rallies:** Ethnic Armenians gathered in Akhalkalaki, to protest against the closure of the Russian military base. The organizers, the **Virk Party** and the **Our Javakhk** organization, said at least 8,000 people attended the rally.⁶⁷ Participants also sent a message to the Georgian authorities to recognize and denounce the fact of the **Armenian Genocide** in the Ottoman Empire. The rally, which lasted for more than five hours, resulted in a document addressed to official Tbilisi where the first point regarded the necessity of recognizing the Genocide. The rally also coincided with the official visit of Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zurabishvili to Turkey, during which a protocol on Georgian-Turkish-Azerbaijani cooperation was signed.⁶⁸
- **Arm. Church takes action:** Armenian delegation visited Tbilisi to discuss problems regarding Armenian Church and cultural heritage.⁶⁹
- **JAVAKHK organizes rally:** On March 31, thousands of SJ Armenians rallied again with demands to (1) passport services **return to Akhalkalaki**, (2) to include Armenian **history classes** in the curriculum of the Armenian school in Georgia, (3) **Armenian language** be granted official status in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda areas, (4) recognition of the **Armenian genocide** of 1915 by the Georgian Parliament, (5) Vote for the law on the protection of National Minorities Rights in Georgia. (6) **Maintain Russian Military base** in Akhalkalaki. **United Javakhk** was among the organizers of the rally.⁷⁰

May:

- **Central Government takes action – appeasement:** Georgian Prosecutor General promised to take a strong hold about vandalism in Armenian Churches of Georgia.⁷¹
- **NGOs collaborate with Russia:** Council of the Armenian Organizations of SJ demanded that **Russian militaries** stay in the region.⁷²

June:

- **Locals protest:** On June 7, **Central Government takes action – pressure:** the police of SJ headed by the coordinator of the region's law enforcement forces **Aram Poghosian** crushed down the rally of Armenian protesting the decision of the education minister to sack the headmaster of the Akhaltsikhe School Lyuba Matevosian. She was replaced by Russian-speaking Robert Muradian.⁷³

July:

- **Diaspora takes action:** The students of Javakhk schools received prizes for their entries in the "I am Armenian" contest. The contest was sponsored by the Javakhk branch of the **Armenian Relief Society (ARS)**.⁷⁴
- **VIRK takes action - violence:** SJ Armenians of Akhalkalaki attacked a local branch of Tbilisi State University, shattering windows and breaking furniture. They also attacked Georgian students, after learning that they had "cleaned up an abandoned church and surrounding, located in the remote village of Samsa." David Rstakyan said the outrage grounded on the fact that Georgians were damaging inscriptions on the walls of the Armenian Church.⁷⁵

⁶⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian Armenians rally against Russian pullout in Akhalkalak, Mar. 14, 2005

⁶⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Recognition Demanded in Georgia: Rally in Armenian province seen as "separatist", Mar. 14, 2005

⁶⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Armenian delegation to discuss in Georgia problems regarding elimination of armenian church ..., Mar. 23, 2005

⁷⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: *Rally in Javakhk*, Apr. 04, 2005

⁷¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgia's chief prosecutor to promise to punish vandals, May 18, 2005

⁷² JAVAKHK.COM: Council of the Armenian Organizations of Samtskhe-Javakhk reviews its position on Russian base, May 24, 2005

⁷³ JAVAKHK.COM: An attempt to denationalize Armenian school of akhaltskha? Jun. 08, 2005

⁷⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: ARS Marks Children's Day in Javakhk, Jul 07, 2005

⁷⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: Russian paper predicts heightened tension in armenian- populated region of georgia, Jul. 20, 2005; Also: *Bad Blood: Clash in Akhalkalak the latest evidence of tensions in Georgia*, Jul. 22, 2005

- **Armenia supports stability:** Armenian PM visited SJ where he was met by his Georgian counterpart. They announced that Armenia is prepared to help the Georgia finance road repairs. Locals declared that there are no problems between Georgians and Armenians. Georgian PM said it was a very good idea to do this visit, and that discussions would mainly refer to economic cooperation between our two countries, and specifically, development of Javakheti.⁷⁶

August:

- **Central Government takes action – integration:** President Saakashvili announced plans to purchase food for Georgian Army from SJ locals. The statement was seen as attempt to lay out schemes for substitution of the social effect of Russian military base in Akhalkalaki.⁷⁷

September:

- **Arm. Church takes action:** Repaired school building was opened in a village of Akhalkalaki region. The building was repaired on the initiative of ARS by funding from **Armenian Diocesan Council of Tehran.**⁷⁸
- **Central Government takes anti-Armenian/Russian stance:** Georgian PM announced again plans to support plans for Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway.⁷⁹
- **Central Government takes action – integration:** New Armenian school was opened in Tbilisi. President Saakashvili paid visit on the opening.⁸⁰
- **Central Government takes action – integration:** Georgian PM Noghaideli visited Armenia to meet President Kocharyan. Noghaideli told the president that the Georgian government was planning to implement in Samtskhe-Javakheti a five-year program for the maintenance of roads, Funds came from the US Millennium Challenge Fund and partially from Georgian budget. Noghaideli also said Georgian government intended to implement educational programs for the Armenian-speaking population and build schools in SJ. Kocharyan spoke of the importance of cooperation in the energy sector, which, he said, could become a real program for regional cooperation. Kocharyan and Noghaideli noted the importance of creating new transport possibilities, in particular, direct flights between the capitals and railway communications from Yerevan to Batumi.⁸¹

October:

- **Central Government takes control:** SJ Armenians protested decisions made by the financial and tax services. **Locals rally:** Officials had started auditing about 10 shops in the town, prompting the shop owners to stage noisy protests. **Central Government takes action – pressure:** In an attempt to ease tensions, representatives of the Interior Ministry's emergency situations department fired several shots in the air, causing panic among the protesters, some of whom suffered minor injuries.⁸²
- **Anonymous provocation:** Serious **provocation** was attempted on Oct. 11, amidst tensions regarding the closure of few shops by the financial police: leaflets were spread in SJ where unknown organization identifying itself as "Akhalsikhe Liberation Brigade" was threatening local Armenians to leave out.⁸³ The provocation was perceived as **staged by Russia** by all in Georgian political spectrum, even by ethnic Armenian MPs.⁸⁴

⁷⁶ JAVAHK.COM: Armenia to help fund road building in ethnic Armenian region of Georgia, Jul. 24, 2005

⁷⁷ JAVAHK.COM: Saakashvili resolute to improve living conditions in Javakhk, Aug. 18, 2005

⁷⁸ JAVAHK.COM: Repaired school building opens in akhalkalak village of Ghado, Sep. 14, 2005

⁷⁹ JAVAHK.COM: Georgian PM pressures Armenia over Turkish railway project, Sep. 25, 2005

⁸⁰ JAVAHK.COM: Georgian President Visits Ethnic Minority Schools, Sep. 26, 2005

⁸¹ JAVAHK.COM: Armenian president, Georgian premier discuss projects in ethnic Armenian region, Sep. 30, 2005

⁸² JAVAHK.COM: Georgian Governor Criticizes Police for Firing in the Air During Armenian Rally, Oct. 06, 2005

⁸³ JAVAHK.COM: Unknown organization threatens to massacre Armenians of Akhaltsikha, Oct. 12, 2005

⁸⁴ JAVAHK.COM: Deputies of georgian parliament see "russian trace" in latest provocations in Akhalkalak and Akhaltskhe, Oct. 14, 2005

- **Central Government takes anti-Russian stance:** On October 12, Georgian section of BTC was opened.⁸⁵

November:

- **Central Government takes action – integration:** Georgian and Armenian Prosecutors General jointly opened the new office of SJ Prosecutor.⁸⁶

December:

- **Central Government takes action – control:** On December 11, another incident occurred in SJ. The reason was dismissal of ethnic Armenians from the customs office at the Armenian-Georgian border. **Locals take action - violence:** Hundreds of local residents rallied near the customs office and border stations and appealed to the SJ Governor to investigate the situation. Later, a fight between the residents and Georgian custom officials and frontier guards occurred. Georgian officers left the check-points that were then partially destroyed by the locals.⁸⁷
- **Armenia supports SJ kin:** Armenian Human Rights Defender Larisa Alaverdyan addressed to People's defender of Georgia Sozar Subari in connection with events in Javakheti customs office. "Addressing to You, I hope that you'll actively interfere in the regulation of the problem. I am sure that Your participation in this affair will help to find solutions to this uneasy situation», read the letter.⁸⁸
- **ARF demands autonomy:** Hrant Margarian, de-factor leader of the **Armenian Revolutionary Federation** (ARF), dismissed allegations that Armenians in the southern Georgian region of Javakheti want to break away from Georgia, saying they want autonomy to maintain their ethnic identity and culture.⁸⁹
- **JAVAKHK takes action - disobedience:** On Dec. 27th, the press-release of Javakhk went against the Tbilisi State University branch of SJ: "Unfortunately, the branch of the University ... has turned into to the next mechanism of changing the demographic situation in Javakhk to the detriment of Armenian majority and center of tension in the region. In the first academic year, the 60% of students were the local Armenians and the remaining 40% were Georgians from Javakhk, Samtskhe and other adjacent regions. In 2005, 80 persons have entered to the university. Only four of them are natives from Javakhk, two Armenians and two Georgians. The other 76 students are of Georgian nationality, which have arrived from the other regions of Georgia" – read the press-release.⁹⁰
- **Georgian Church takes action - pressure:** The Saint Synod of Georgian Orthodox Church claims that the statements by the certain Armenians about existence of huge number of Armenian churches in Georgia lack both historic and scientific grounds.⁹¹

⁸⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian section of Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline opens, Oct. 14, 2005

⁸⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Prosecutor general of Armenia to visit Georgia, Nov. 29, 2005

⁸⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Another incident in Samtskhe-Javakhetia, Dec. 12.2005

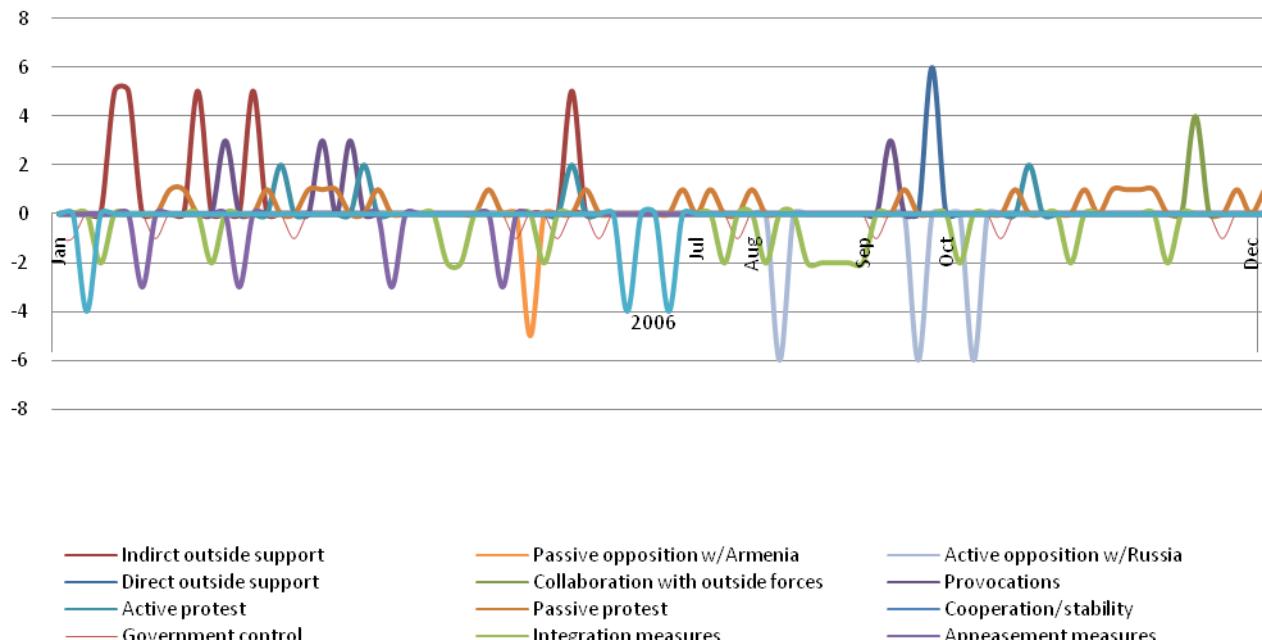
⁸⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Ra ombudsman's letter to people's defender of Georgia, Dec. 16, 2005

⁸⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Arf Leader Says Georgian Armenians Do Not Want To Break Away, Dec. 23, 2005

⁹⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Democratic Alliance "United Javakhk" On The Activity Of Ahalkalak Branch Of Tbilisi State University, Dec. 27, 2005

⁹¹ JAVAKHK.COM: *Holy Xenophobia*, Dec. 28, 2005

Interaction of different forces in SJ, 2006



January:

- **Central Government takes action – control:** Georgian Financial Police sealed the branches of the Armenian universities operating illegally in Samtskhe-Javakheti region. The Law and Economic University of Yerevan had its illegal branch in Akhalkalaki, which was giving classes and certifying the students there. proceedings were instituted on a charge of illegal business activities.⁹²
- **Central Government takes action – control:** Georgian Chapel opened in Akhalkalaki. Parliament Speaker Nino Burjanadze arrived in Akhalkalaki to attend a solemn opening ceremony of the new Georgian Orthodox Church.⁹³
- **Central Government takes action – pressure:** Georgian State Minister on Conflict Settlement Giorgi Khaindrava told a news conference in Baku that Georgia is ready to receive people deported from Meskhetia in 1944. Commenting on protests of SJ Armenians against the repatriation of Meskhetians to the region, Khaindrava said that the Georgian government would act according to its own plan, but not to demands "from aside".⁹⁴

February:

- **Int. Org. takes action:** "CARE International" launched the three-year program in SJ by financing of the Government of UK. Main directions of the program were regional programming and optimization of management ways, improvement of social-economic conditions of the community, development of agriculture, tourism and social infrastructures.⁹⁵
- An Armenian church in Georgia has again become a subject of debate following a long term dispute between Armenian and Georgian churches.⁹⁶

⁹² JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian Financial Police Seals Armenian Universities' Branches in Samtske-Javakheti, Jan. 06, 2006

⁹³ JAVAKHK.COM: Parliament Speaker leaves for Akhalkalaki, Jan. 15, 2006

⁹⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgia ready to receive deported meskhetians, minister says in Azeri capital, Jan. 30, 2006

⁹⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: International Organization to Implement Three-Years Development Program In Javakhk, Feb. 06, 2006

⁹⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Church Quarrel: Armenian church in Tbilisi under threat, Feb. 10, 2006

- **ARF demands autonomy:** Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutsyun has organized in Yerevan discussion "Javakhk against 21st century challenges". It was stated that SJ ethnic Armenians are to choose between annihilation and merging.⁹⁷ The conference was closed by statements that demand for autonomy within Georgia is the best appropriate solution for ethnic Armenians of SJ.⁹⁸ Haykazun Alvrtsyan, PhD in Philosophy, stated on the conference that "**by losing Javakhk Armenia will lose an opportunity to influence the situation in the region.** The area should be used not for deteriorating Georgia, but to sustain balance".⁹⁹ "Javakheti becomes a **barrier on the way of pan-Turkism** both in economic and political respects. The Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway, the inflow of Georgian population to Akhaltsikhe, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline - all of these make Armenians leave their native localities. If no measures are taken to prevent migration, Javakheti may suffer the fate of Nakhichevan," Alvrtsyan said.¹⁰⁰
- **ARF demands autonomy:** "We've announced several times that we are concerned about stability of Georgia. The case in point is the defense of rights of Armenian people in Javakhk", one of the leaders of Armenia's ARF Dashnaktsutsyun, **Mr. Mkrtchyan**, stated in Armenian Parliament. "If Georgian government goes to federalization and gives national minorities an opportunity to have their cultural autonomy, it naturally involves Javakhk, too" – he said.¹⁰¹
- **Int. Org. takes action – appeasement:** EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner said in Yerevan commenting on the correspondent's question about Azerbaijan's statement that the European Union supported the construction of the Kars-Akhalkalaki railway that "the European Commission will not finance a railway construction project in which Armenia is not involved."¹⁰²
- **Central Government takes action – control:** SJ judges were released on the pretext of ignorance of Georgian language. The council of SJ NGOs said the organizations should double their efforts to raise this issue with international organizations and press for granting the Armenian language in the region the status of official language.¹⁰³ **NGOs demand language status.**

March:

- **Armenia supports kin, against railroad project:** Serge Sargsian, Armenian Defense Minister, stated in his "RA National Security Strategic Principle" report that Armenia is concerned with the inner instability of Georgia. The professional and economic-social status of the Georgian-Armenians gradually gets worse and this factor is a real threat. The document also stated that instable inner political situation of Georgia also threatens the transport communication of Armenia with the outer world. While national intolerance may cause anti-Armenian attitude and immigration of the Armenians from Javakhk. On the other hand, the Georgia-Turkish and Georgian-Azeri cooperation projects may also break the balance in our region and isolate Armenia. In this respect, Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad is of greater danger for Armenia.¹⁰⁴
- **Int. Org. takes action:** MCG Corporation approved five-year program of \$295.3mln for Georgia. \$130mln were intended for SJ development of which \$110mln - for new highway construction. Armenian representatives were invited to participate in NGOs consultative meeting to be held on March 14th in Tbilisi.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷ JAVAHK.COM: Dashnaktsutsyun demands autonomy for Javakhk, Feb. 14, 2006

⁹⁸ JAVAHK.COM: Demand for autonomy within Georgia is inalienable right of inhabitants of Javakhk..., Feb. 14, 2006

⁹⁹ JAVAHK.COM: Riot of Javakheti Armenians is "premises for collapse of Georgian state", Feb. 14, 2006

¹⁰⁰ JAVAHK.COM: Samtskhe-Javakheti may suffer same fate as Nakhichevan, Feb. 14, 2006

¹⁰¹ JAVAHK.COM: Javakhk needs cultural autonomy, Feb. 16, 2006

¹⁰² JAVAHK.COM: EU does not support regional projects without Armenia's involvement, Feb. 17, 2006

¹⁰³ JAVAHK.COM: Armenians in Javakheti want Armenian to become official language, Feb. 28, 2006

¹⁰⁴ JAVAHK.COM: Armenia is concerned with inner instability of Georgia, Mar. 08, 2006

¹⁰⁵ JAVAHK.COM: Armenia invited for NGOs' consultative meeting on project of roads restoration in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia, Mar. 09, 2006

- **Clashes occurred:** On March 9, a clash occurred between the Tsalka Armenians and unidentified group. Locals thought they were Georgian settlers. One Armenian died, two wounded. Police sealed the roads to prevent further clashes.¹⁰⁶
- **Central Government takes action – appeasement:** Georgian Ambassador to Armenia made appeasement talks on the conference organized by the “Mighty Homeland” party in Yerevan. He said investments from Armenian diaspora would be welcomed in SJ.¹⁰⁷
- **Arm. Church takes action:** Supreme Spiritual Council of Armenia discussed problems of Armenian Diocese of Georgia. In response to a query from the Supreme Spiritual Council, Bishop Vazgen confirmed that the Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Church, with their decision of February 6, 2006, announced the creation of a **new diocese within the Republic of Armenia entitled Tashir-Agarak**, subject to the bishop of the Diocese of Dmanisi in Georgia, “...with the intent of reestablishing its historic diocese”. The Supreme Spiritual Council of Armenia expressed disappointment that the Georgian Orthodox Church did not inform the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin regarding the creation of a new diocese located in the northern region of the Republic of Armenia, and that their Georgian Synod created a new diocese in a region where the Georgian Church has no faithful;¹⁰⁸
- **Arm. Church takes action:** In the SJ district of Akhaltsikhe, the ceremony of sanctifying of the St. Savior chapel took place. The ceremony was carried out by leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church Georgian diocese Vazgen Archbishop Mirzakhanyan and deputy leader of SJ, Babken abbot Salbiyan.¹⁰⁹
- **Locals take action - rally in Tsalka:** Over 300 residents of Tsalka gathered at the police building to hold a protest action. They organized riots and broke windows of Police building. Police said that five suspects have already been arrested, but protesters demanded lynching of suspects¹¹⁰. Georgian parliament member Hayk Meltonyan said that some 100 protesters were beaten by the police.¹¹¹
- **Central Government takes action - control:** The representative of the Ombudsman's Office arrived in the region to meet the head of the local governmental unit, local police chief and local residents.¹¹²
- **NGOs demand autonomy:** SJ Armenian NGOs sent a letter to Georgian President requesting the autonomy status.¹¹³
- **Locals undertake violence:** Armenian population of Akhalkalaki raided buildings of local administration, Court and branch of Tbilisi State University on Saturday. Participants of the action gathered regarding the murder on March 09 in Tsalka. **Demand language statute:** They also demanded that Armenian language be allowed in office work in SJ and also stated that education process in Akhalkalaki branch of Tbilisi State University should be held on Armenian. Participants of the action also tried to enter the building of Akhalkalaki Patriarchy of Georgia, as according to them there was ammunition in large amount. Representatives of the SJ regional Police stated that the situation was under control.¹¹⁴ A person named Khachatur Stepanian was among the organizers of the riots.¹¹⁵
- Temur Lomsadze, Chief Adviser of State Minister on Issues of Conflict Settlement said that Meskhetian Turks can be settled in Tsalka region as the houses of the Greeks who have emigrated from Tsalka can be bought at incomparably cheap prices.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Ethnic clashes in Tsalka (Georgia): victims reported, Mar. 09, 2006

¹⁰⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian ambassador to Armenia appeals to diasporan Armenians to make investments in Javakhk, Mar. 09, 2006

¹⁰⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Supreme Spiritual Council Discusses Armenian Diocese of Georgia, Mar. 09, 2006

¹⁰⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: 19th century chapel reconstructed in Akhaltsikha, Mar. 10, 2006

¹¹⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgia: What happened in Tsalka (Kvemo Kartli)?, Mar. 11, 2006

¹¹¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Armenians of Tsalka Hold Protest Action, Mar. 10, 2006

¹¹² JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian Ombudsman To Study Accident In Tsalka, Mar. 10, 2006

¹¹³ JAVAKHK.COM: Javakheti organizations request Georgian President for autonomy, Mar. 10, 2006

¹¹⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Armenian Population Of Akhalkalaki Raided Buildings Of Local Administration, Mar. 11, 2006

¹¹⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: Protesters Raid Court, University in Akhalkalaki, Mar. 11, 2006

¹¹⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Meskhetian Turks to be resettled in Tsalka Region, Mar. 12, 2006

- **NGOs demand investigation:** "Civil Movement "Multi-National Georgia" (head: Arnold Stepanian) and the "Nor Serund" (New Generation) union of the Georgian Armenians made a statement in which they turn to the Government of Georgia with a request to carry out an objective examination of the incident in Tsalka, to punish those guilty in the way envisaged by the legislation, as well as to make publicity to what had happened.¹¹⁷
- **NGOs call for intervention from Armenia:** Hrazdan Madoyan, representative of "Javakhk" council (consists of 15 NGOs) declared that there can be two possible developments of Javakhk problem: either it will become a second Nakhichevan or a second Karabakh. According to him, if Armenia wants to exist as a state in the region, it should be able to preserve what is still Armenian. According to the Council representatives, if necessary, Armenia should bring troops into Javakhk. In response to the question, if Armenia is able to open the second front, Council representative Gagik Ginosyan said that this would be already the fourth front for Georgia. He said the war shouldn't been avoided in case of a danger of losing the homeland (Armenia). He also clarified that "in the issue of Javakhk (Javakheti) we deal with the physical existence of the Republic of Armenia".¹¹⁸
- Claims by Georgian officials that Russian servicemen were involved in protest rallies in Akhalkalaki (Interfax-AVN was told by phone by deputy commander of Russia's 62nd Base Col Igor Luzhnikov that the claims are unfounded).¹¹⁹
- **Locals take action - Rally in Tsalka:** 3000 people took part in burial ceremony of the young man who was murdered in Tsalka.¹²⁰
- **Locals demand language status:** New wave of demands started to grant to Armenian official status in SJ
- **Central Government take action – appeasement:** Ethnic Armenian MP Van Baiburt said that these demands are unrealistic but that Georgian government agreed to allow running of official businesses in Armenian¹²¹
- **Russia withdraws bases:** On March 17, Russia has submitted detailed plan of withdrawal of military bases from Georgia.¹²²
- **Russia withdraws bases:** On March 31, Russian and Georgian officials signed final agreements on base withdrawal.¹²³

April:

- **Locals cooperate:** Armenian news agencies reported that SJ Armenians did not respond to calls to rally on March 16.¹²⁴
- **Int. Org. take action:** The European Union and Germany's Association of People's Universities announced 30-month long project in SJ with total budget of 500,000 EUR. Adriana Longon, director of EU Programs, said that the purpose of the project was to protect rights of ethnic minorities and help their integration with the rest of the country. The project envisioned teaching civic rights, Georgian language and entrepreneurship.¹²⁵
- **Central Government takes action – integration:** Georgian Health and Social Care Ministry announced plans to ensure that primary medical care is provided for free in SJ.¹²⁶

¹¹⁷ JAVAHK.COM: "Multi-National Georgia" Movement And "Nor Serund" Union Ask To Carry Out..., Mar. 13, 2006

¹¹⁸ JAVAHK.COM: Javakhk council convinced that if necessary, Armenia should open second front, Mar. 14, 2006

¹¹⁹ JAVAHK.COM: Russia denies Georgia-based servicemen involved in public protests, Mar. 15, 2006

¹²⁰ JAVAHK.COM: 3 thousand take part in burial of Gevorgyan killed in Tsalka, Mar. 16, 2006

¹²¹ JAVAHK.COM: Georgian MP says official status for Armenian language unrealistic, Mar. 16, 2006

¹²² JAVAHK.COM: Moscow Submits 2006 Schedule of Military Bases' Withdrawal, Mar. 18, 2006

¹²³ JAVAHK.COM: Agreements signed on Russian military withdrawal from Georgia, Apr. 04, 2006

¹²⁴ JAVAHK.COM: Situation in Javakhk calms down, Apr. 04, 2006; Also: The situation in Javakhk is stable, Apr. 04, 2006

¹²⁵ JAVAHK.COM: EU and Germany to carry out project for Javakheti Armenians, Apr. 06, 2006

¹²⁶ JAVAHK.COM: Probably primary medical aid to be free in Javakhk, Apr. 07, 2005

- **ARF cooperates:** ARF Dashnaksutsyun announced that it is not against territorial integrity of Georgia.¹²⁷
- Works of improvement started inside the Surb Nshan Armenian church of Akhalsikhe and in its yard, on the initiative of the "Zori Zorian" youth union. ¹²⁸
- **Armenia supports SJ kin:** Ambassador of Armenia to Georgia and the Primate of the Virahayots Diocese of the Armenian Church visited to SJ on April 15.¹²⁹
- **Central Government takes action – appeasement:** Few Turkish-Meskhetian families were resettled in Georgia, but in Gori region, not in SJ.¹³⁰
- **Central Government takes control:** Defense ministry of Georgia said it would establish a military police department in Akhalkalaki, saying the department was necessary to ensure security in the course of Russian military base pullout. ¹³¹
- **Georgian Church claims rights in Armenia:** Georgian NGO "National Lobby" declared that Georgian side had all grounds to request returning of Georgian Churches from Armenia and Israel. ¹³²
- **Central Government takes action – integration:** Mikhail Saakashvili paid a short visit to SJ on April 19. The President attended the ceremony of starting the construction of the Aspindza-Akhalkalaki road, within the framework of the MCG program.¹³³
- **Central Government takes control:** Few police officers, who had received higher education in Armenia, were released from their jobs.¹³⁴
- **Locals rally:** About 300 ethnic Armenian inhabitants of SJ blocked the column of Russian equipment on its way from Georgia and made it return to the base. **Demand Russians stay:** They said that "as long as the authorities of Georgia will not answer the unresolved questions, in particular on the problem of safety of the Armenians in region and creation for them work sites, Russian military equipment will not leave region "¹³⁵
- **Locals claim genocide recognition:** The 91st anniversary of the Armenian Genocide was marked in SJ on April 23-24. A torch-light procession took place in the cities of Akhalsikhe and Ninotsminda on late April 23. The procession was organized on the initiative of the "Zori Zorian" youth union. ¹³⁶

May:

- **Central Government takes action – control:** Military unit of 50 troops is brought in SJ by Georgian DoD. Official reason is to secure safe withdrawal of Russian troops from the region. ¹³⁷
- **Russians withdraw:** The first convoy of military equipment left Russian base on May 15.¹³⁸
- **Central Government takes action – pressure:** Azerbaijan's Aliyev declared that Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Karsi railway might start in 2006. The project envisages building of 98 km railway line between Akhalkalaki and Karsi. 27 km of this segment are on the Georgian territory and 72 km in the Turkish side. The project also envisages rehabilitation of the old obsolete Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki segment of the existing railway. It is estimated that its realization needs USD 350-450 million. The project is envisaged to be carried out in two

¹²⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: ARF Dashnaksutsyun not at all against territorial entity of Georgia, Apr. 11, 2006

¹²⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Youth of Akhalkska put in good order Armenian Surb Nshan Church and its yard, Apr. 14, 2006

¹²⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: RA Ambassador to Georgia and primate of Virahayots diocese visit Javakhk, Apr. 17, 2006

¹³⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Repatriation of Turks -Meskhetians - "catastrophe with the political, economic and social points of view", Apr. 17, 2006

¹³¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgia to deploy military police in Akhalkalaki, Apr. 19, 2006

¹³² JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian NGO responses St. Etchmiadzin, Apr. 20, 2006

¹³³ JAVAKHK.COM: Saakashvili pays short-term visit to Javakhk, Apr. 21, 2006

¹³⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Armenian policemen are replaced with Georgians, Apr. 26, 2006

¹³⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: Armenians returned military equipment back on 62nd Russian base in Akhalkalaki, Apr. 26, 2006

¹³⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Javakhk marks 91st anniversary of Armenian genocide, Apr. 27, 2006

¹³⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Defence ministry of Georgia brings detachment involving 50 people into Javakhk, May 12, 2006

¹³⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Russians start withdrawal from military base in Georgia, May 15, 2006

stages. At the initial stage only one track will be built and trains will start running on it and only later second track will be constructed.¹³⁹

- **Armenia supports stability:** Several statements were made by Georgian and Armenian authorities promising cooperation in averting further tensions in SJ.
- **Russians withdraw:** Russian military vehicles and hardware left Batumi (Adjara) base.¹⁴⁰
- **Central Government takes action – pressure:** Robert Skoyan, the former Education Department head of the Education Resource-Center of the region of Ninotsminda was discharged because he didn't spoke Georgian. Marine Zalalian who earlier worked at Georgian National Security Ministry and knows the Georgian language took the place of Skoyan on this post.¹⁴¹
- **Diaspora takes action:** ARS funded competition in Armenian history took place in SJ.¹⁴²

July:

- **Russians withdraw:** Another trainload of Russian military equipment left Georgia¹⁴³
- **Diaspora takes action:** On the initiative of the Armenian Educational Union of America the building of the Akhalkalake's Museum of Regional Studies was repaired.¹⁴⁴
- **Int. Org. takes action:** Urban Institute of Georgia announced plans to initiate the construction of a new building for the agricultural goods' market in Ninotsminda.¹⁴⁵
- **Civil Society takes action – integration:** Representatives of Armenian-populated regions of Georgia took part in Tbilisi seminar named "Active national minorities for democratic society". The seminar was organized by Georgian NGOs.¹⁴⁶

August:

- **Diaspora takes action:** Husik Abgaryan, Russian-based ethnic Armenian businessman, Surb Haroutiun Church was reconstructed in Akhalkalaki.¹⁴⁷
- **Central Government takes action – integration:** The Railway Department of Georgia started restoration the Tsalka-Ninotsminda-Akhalkalaki railway.¹⁴⁸
- **Central Government takes anti-Russian stance:** Russia requested visas for 1000 military servicemen to enter Georgia and continue work on base-withdrawal process.¹⁴⁹ Georgia denies.
- **Russians withdraw:** Final convoy of Russian military left Akhalkalaki.¹⁵⁰
- **Int. Org. takes action:** UNIFEM held a seminar on women's rights in Akhaltsikhe.¹⁵¹

¹³⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Karsi-Akhalkalaki railway construction might start this year, May 15, 2006

¹⁴⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Russia pulling out military hardware from Batumi base in Georgia, May 26, 2006

¹⁴¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Ninotsminda region educational fired for not knowing Georgian, May 29, 2006

¹⁴² JAVAKHK.COM: Competition-olympiad on Armenian history held in Javakhk, May 30, 2006

¹⁴³ JAVAKHK.COM: Another trainload of Russian military hardware leaves Georgia, Jul. 18, 2006

¹⁴⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Building of Museum of Regional Studies repaired, Jul. 18, 2006

¹⁴⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: New market building to be built in Poktanovka, Jul. 18, 2006

¹⁴⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Representatives of Armenian-populated regions of Georgia to take part in Tbilisi seminar, Jul. 28, 2006

¹⁴⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Another Church reconsecrated in Javakhk, Aug. 01, 2006

¹⁴⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Tsalka-Ninotsminda-Akhalkalak railway being restored, Aug. 01, 2006

¹⁴⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Russian command requests Georgian visas for over 1,000 servicemen, Aug. 04, 2006

¹⁵⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Final convoy of military hardware to Gyumri leaves Akhalkalaki, Aug. 17, 2006

¹⁵¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Seminar dedicated to women's rights held in Akhaltsikhe, Aug. 17, 2006

- **Int. Org. takes action:** BBC bureau in Tbilisi announces opening of new radio station in Ninotsminda since October 1.¹⁵²
- **Central Government takes action – integration:** Georgian PM visited new facilities in SJ under construction. He also promised to help local farmers who suffered from drought.¹⁵³
- **Int. Org. takes action:** OSCE sponsored special training for ethnic Armenian teachers of SJ.¹⁵⁴

September:

- **Int. Org. takes action:** OSCE sponsored training for the teachers of Georgian language in SJ.¹⁵⁵
- **Central Government takes control:** Preparations for local government elections have started. 129 candidates were to participate in the elections.¹⁵⁶
- **Provocation by unknown:** Plans to erect 8 meter-high monument of ethnic Armenian Soviet general were announced in SJ. According to the plan, the monument would face towards “western Armenia” (Turkey).¹⁵⁷
- **Diaspora takes action:** ARS presented books to SJ schools.¹⁵⁸
- **Central Government takes anti-Russian stance:** Four Russian officers have been arrested and charged with espionage in Tbilisi¹⁵⁹
- **Russian intimidation:** Russia suspended troop pullout “until the security situation be restored”¹⁶⁰

October:

- **Russians withdraw:** Having consulted with NSC, Putin ordered to continue **withdrawal** of Russian troops from Georgia.¹⁶¹
- **Central Government takes action – integration:** Georgian PM issued decree proposing **special discounts** at the expense of state budget for students from SJ.¹⁶²
- **Central Government takes anti-Russian stance:** Georgian Defense Minister **Okruashvili** stated that Russia will be able to move personnel and equipment from the Russian military base in Gyumri (Armenia) through Georgian territory only if such agreement is reached with Tbilisi. “Those who think they can make life difficult for Georgia's people should think very carefully about similar levers that we have” – said he.¹⁶³
- **Armenia supports stability:** One of the leaders of Javakhk, **Vahagn Chakhalyan** was arrested by Armenian National Security Service on October 10. Chakhalyan entered Armenia together with another member of Javakhk, **Gurgen Shirinyan**, when, according to Javakhk.com, the two men were attacked by unidentified people. The latter was released, while Chakhalyan was sentenced for two-month preventive detention until the final investigation.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵² JAVAKHK.COM: New Radio to open in Javakheti, Aug. 23, 2006

¹⁵³ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian Prime Minister visits Javakhk, Aug. 24, 2006

¹⁵⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Teachers of Armenian language and literature undergo training in Javakhk, Aug. 24, 2006

¹⁵⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: Teachers of georgian re-trained in Javakhk, Sep. 04, 2006

¹⁵⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: 129 candidatures are nominated at elections of local self-government bodies..., Sep. 06, 2006

¹⁵⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Monument to General Gurgen Dalibaltyan to Be Erected in Javakhk, Sep. 21, 2006

¹⁵⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: A book for Armenian schools of Javakhk, Sep. 26, 2006

¹⁵⁹ CIVIL.GE: 4 Russian officers arrested, charged with espionage, Sep. 27, 2006

¹⁶⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Moscow suspended Georgia troop pullout, Sep. 30, 2006

¹⁶¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Russia's president orders to continue withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia's territory, Oct. 02, 2006

¹⁶² JAVAKHK.COM: Georgia establishes special discounts for students from Javakhk, Oct. 03, 2006

¹⁶³ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian DM warns Russia to “Think carefully” about sanctions, Oct. 03, 2006

¹⁶⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian Armenians protest against arrest of activist in Yerevan, Oct. 14, 2006

- **Central Government takes control:** On October 5th, elections of local administrations were held in Georgia. Elections were tense in Tsalka region. In SJ, ethnic Armenians were elected.¹⁶⁵
- **JAVAKHK demands new election:** SJ locals claimed that elections were rigged and “Javakhk” appealed to President Saakashvili to annul the results and hold new elections.¹⁶⁶ **VIRK cooperates:** It is interesting that “Virk” sided with Saakashvili party and won several seats while “Javakhk” sided with opposition party “Industry will Save Georgia”. Out of total 32 seats of the Regional Council, 27 were secured by ethnic Armenians.¹⁶⁷
- **JAVAKHK rally:** Javakhk members, along with their partner opposition party staged rallies and briefly seized the local government building saying they were robbed of victory.
- **Armenia supports stability:** In Yerevan, the head of the Javakhk Compatriots’ Union, **Shirak Torosian**, denounced the United Javakhk actions as “treason.” “We are calling on all forces in Javakheti to show prudence, put aside personal, factional interests and **not serve third forces**,” he told a news conference. Torosian also urged Javakheti Armenian activists to **drop their demands** for the impoverished region to be given the status **of autonomy**.¹⁶⁸
- **Central Government takes action – integration:** Government-funded program of integration for SJ and Adjara children was carried out.¹⁶⁹
- **Locals protest – support leader:** SJ Armenians have protested the arrest of **Chakhalyan**.¹⁷⁰
- **NGOs protest:** Committee of Armenian NGOs of SJ said it was Georgian policy to divide Armenians.¹⁷¹
- **Armenia supports stability:** Senior Armenian lawmakers exposed official Yerevan’s frustration with Russia’s transport blockade of Georgia, telling it is taking an economic toll on Armenia.¹⁷²
- **Int. Org. takes action:** BBC has undertaken a reporters' seminar dedicated to ethnic minorities.¹⁷³
- **Armenia supports kin:** Several Armenian MPs issued demands to immediately release Javakhk's Chakhalyan.¹⁷⁴
- **Diaspora takes action:** ARS delegation visited school with only 32 ethnic Armenian pupils (out of 180) in Abastumani and promised to solve heating problems. The visit was perceived as sign for further integration.¹⁷⁵
- **Int. Org. takes action:** By the help of USAID, new potato preservation depot was opened in the village of Khanto. Potato is main agricultural good in SJ.¹⁷⁶
- **Locals protest - support leader:** Rally was held in SJ demanding Chakhalyan's release.¹⁷⁷ Nobody spoke of real reasons of the leader's detention. Instead, speakers concentrated on social and economic problems of the region. However, Javakhk member Aram Batoyan, said Georgia and Armenia should not be solving their problems at the expense of Javakheti, hinting to cooperation between the two countries regarding Chakhalyan issue.¹⁷⁸

¹⁶⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: The Armenian candidate won the election in the Armenian-Georgian mixed electoral district of Akhaltskha, Oct. 05, 2006

¹⁶⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: United Javakh appeals to President Saakashvili, Oct. 09, 2006

¹⁶⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Javakheti Armenians urged to show restraint, Oct. 11, 2006

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Integration programs for the Armenian and Ajar schoolchildren, Oct. 13, 2006

¹⁷⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian Armenians protest against arrest of activist in Yerevan, Oct. 14, 2006

¹⁷¹ JAVAKHK.COM: The committee of Armenian NGOs in Samtskhe-Javakhk is urging restraint, Oct. 14, 2006

¹⁷² JAVAKHK.COM: Yerevan Exposes Frustration With Russian Blockade Of Georgia, Oct. 17, 2006

¹⁷³ JAVAKHK.COM: The Reporters' Seminar for ethnic minorities, Oct. 18, 2006

¹⁷⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: A number of Ra Mps demand to immediately release United Javakhk Democratic ..., Oct. 19, 2006

¹⁷⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: The visit of the ARS delegation to Apastuman, Oct. 20, 2006

¹⁷⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: New potato preservation depot in Khanto village, Oct. 23, 2006

¹⁷⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Rally in support of Vahagn Chalyan to be held in Javakheti, Oct. 26, 2006

¹⁷⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Ethnic Armenian movement rallies in Southern Georgia to demand release of leader, Oct. 26, 2006

November:

- **Armenia supports stability:** Chakhalyan has been released from Yerevan prison but not allowed back to Georgia until the end of court ruling. Chakhalyan avoided criticism of Armenian authorities but said “they are doing whatever they think is right”. Commenting the developments about Chakhalyan, Javakhk.com writer Hovhannes Shoghikian said “Official Yerevan has long been striving to get Armenian nationalist groups in Javakheti to show restraint in demanding a status of autonomy...”¹⁷⁹
- **JAVAKHK supports Armenia/Russia:** Javakhk leader warned of large scale protests if the construction of Kars-Akhalkalaki railway goes ahead.¹⁸⁰
- **Armenia supports stability:** Armenia severed border control with SJ.¹⁸¹
- **Central Government takes control:** Special Forces of Georgian Interior Ministry were introduced in Akhalkalaki.¹⁸²
- **Int. Org. takes action:** USAID sponsored training of 12 representatives of SJ in human rights. Training took place in USA. Out of 12, only 3 were ethnic Armenian.¹⁸³

December:

- Chakhalyan was released and deported back to Georgia.¹⁸⁴
- **Armenia supports stability:** Zhirayr Sefilyan, coordinator of the organization called “In Defense of Liberated Territories” and Lieutenant Colonel and former commander of “Shoushi” battalion was arrested in Yerevan.¹⁸⁵
- **Armenia supports kin:** Singers from Armenian Shirak Marz province visited SJ to held “Shirak Marz cultural days in SJ”.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Freed Georgian-Armenian Activist Shows Caution, Nov. 02, 2006

¹⁸⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: United Javakhk warns of protests if Kars-Akhalkalak goes ahead, Nov. 11, 2006

¹⁸¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Javakheti Armenians protest strict border crossing procedures, Nov. 20, 2006

¹⁸² JAVAKHK.COM: For the first time ever, Georgian troops are introduced in the heart of Javakhk, Nov. 21, 2006

¹⁸³ JAVAKHK.COM: The training of Javakhkis in US, Nov. 28, 2006

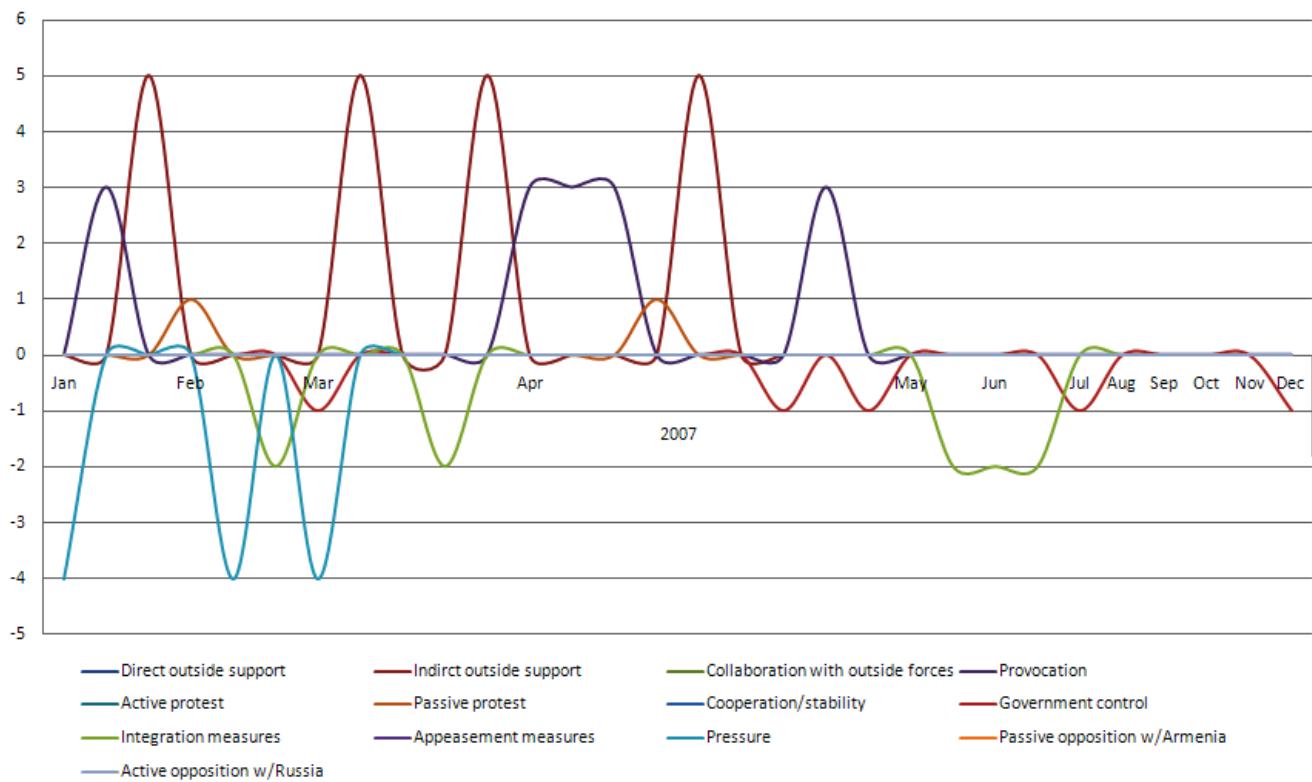
¹⁸⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Javakheti Activist Deported From Armenia, Dec. 04, 2006

¹⁸⁵ ARM.INFO: Arrest of Zhirair Sefilyan is a grand show: political secretary of initiative "in defense of liberated territories", Dec. 13, 2006:
<http://www.arminfo.info/news-issue1538.shtml>

¹⁸⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Shirak Cultural days in Javakhk, Dec. 15, 2006

Year 2007

SJ Reality, 2007



January:

- **Government takes action – pressure:** Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku has been intensively discussed during Jan. 10-12, between the Transport Ministers of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey. No agreement was signed.¹⁸⁷
- **Provocation by unknown/Armenian nationalists:** Hundreds of copies of disputed “documentary” “From Araks to Kur, from Artsakh to Javakhk” by **Tigran Khzmalyan** were confiscated by Armenian NSS. The author was denied air of Armenian TVs. As Khzmalyan himself confirmed, he was financially and technically supported by **Zhirayr Sefilyan**.¹⁸⁸
- **Armenia takes anti-Georgian/Turkish stance:** Spokesman of Armenian President said the railroad project was economically disadvantageous but Georgia, Azerbaijan and Turkey were nevertheless willing to implement it – something Armenian was not in a position to prevent.¹⁸⁹

February:

- **Diaspora takes action:** Youth Union “Zori Zoryan” which is presumably affiliated with “Zoryan Institute” of Armenian studies at Cambridge, conducted games in SJ, oriented at spreading knowledge of Armenian history.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Signing of Agreement on Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railroad project postponed, Jan. 12, 2007

¹⁸⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Copies of Tigran Khzmalian's "From Araks to Kur, from Artsakh to Javakhk" documentary film..., Jan. 19, 2007

¹⁸⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Kars-Akhalkalaki-Baku railroad project economically disadvantageous, Jan. 29, 2007

¹⁹⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Intellectual games in Javakhk, Feb. 02, 2007

- **Government takes action – pressure:** Prime Minister Erdohan, Azerbaijani president Aliyev and the President of Georgia Saakashvili signed agreement of the Kars- Tiflis- Baku railway line. It was stated that the line would be finished in two years.¹⁹¹
- **Government takes action – integration:** The program of Georgian language teaching has launched in Akhaltsikhe. According to plans major part of curriculum should be in Georgian by 2010.¹⁹²

March:

- **Government takes action – control/pressure:** Nine candidates were selected as school principals in SJ, only one Armenian among them. Most ethnic Armenians failed the test because of poor knowledge of Georgian language.¹⁹³
- **Government takes action – pressure:** Turkey has launched railroad works.¹⁹⁴
- **Armenia takes anti-Georgian/Turkish stance:** Armenia's Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanyan announced that Yerevan was opposing the railroad project from Kars to Akhalkalaki.¹⁹⁵
- The car of **Khachik Saharyan**, member of the United Javakhk chairmanship, businessman, was blown in Yekaterinburg, Russia. Saharian was injured. Khachik Saharyan had bad relations with the heads of Yerevan based "**Virahayeri Miasnutiun**" (Unity of Georgian Armenians) and the "**Hzor Hayrenik**" (Powerful Homeland) party. Yet, the reason of attack remained unclear.¹⁹⁶
- **Russians withdraw:** Another portion of Russian military hardware was withdrawn from Georgia (Batumi base).¹⁹⁷
- **Government takes action – integration:** Saakashvili took part in opening of the new sports complex in Ninotsminda.¹⁹⁸
- **Armenia supports kin:** Saint Liturgy was celebrated in the Surb Khach (Saint Cross) church of Akhalkalak in memory of Armenian PM Andranik Margarian.¹⁹⁹

April:

- **Accident:** Misha Kirakosyan, an Armenian resident of Akhaltskhe was killed on April 8.
- **JAVAKHK sows panic:** Javakhk Union released statement regarding the murder of Kirakosyan. The organization said it was continuation of anti-Armenian policies of Georgian government.²⁰⁰
- **NGOs demand Armenia's intervention:** SJ Armenian organizations addressed to Foreign Minister of Armenia asking help in providing physical security of ethnic Armenians of Javakheti.²⁰¹
- **Locals demand language status:** About 300 residents of Akhalkalaki held a meeting on the main square with demands to declare Armenian the regional language in SJ.²⁰²

¹⁹¹ JAVAKHK.COM: The first signature at the “iron silk road” to drive out Armenia, Feb. 08, 2007

¹⁹² JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian language teaching project carried out in Akhaltsikhe schools, Feb. 10, 2007

¹⁹³ JAVAKHK.COM: Georgian principals in Armenian schools, Mar. 05, 2007

¹⁹⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Pan Turkish Railway: Works launched in Turkey in framework of Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway, Mar. 07, 2007

¹⁹⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: Pan-Turkist railway: Armenian foreign minister: Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku project produces negative..., Mar. 09, 2007

¹⁹⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Car of “United Javakhk” chairmanship member Khachik Saharyan blown up., Mar. 13, 2007

¹⁹⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Defence technology withdrawn via Azerbaijan from Russian military bases in Georgia, Mar. 24, 2007

¹⁹⁸ JAVAKHK.COM: Saakashvili to participate in opening of newly-built sports complex in Potaanova, Mar. 24, 2007

¹⁹⁹ JAVAKHK.COM: Saint liturgy to be celebrated in Javakhk in Andranik Margarian’s memory, Mar. 30, 2007

²⁰⁰ JAVAKHK.COM: Statement of “United Javakhk” in connection with murder of armenian resident of Akhaltskha, Apr. 09, 2008

²⁰¹ JAVAKHK.COM: Armenians of Javakhk expect ra foreign minister's protection, Apr. 12, 2007

²⁰² JAVAKHK.COM: Georgia's ethnic Armenians demand regional language status for Armenian, Apr. 13, 2007

- **Armenia supports kin:** Azatagrums-Artsiv (Liberation-Eagle) co-chairmen awarded gold medals to 12 Javakheti Armenians who participated in the Nagorno-Karabakh (Arstakh) war.²⁰³
- **Provocation:** SJ Armenians rally to insult Turkish flag.²⁰⁴
- **Russians withdraw:** Another military convoy left Georgia.²⁰⁵
- **Government takes action – control:** Former mayor of Akhalkalak, **Nairi Irantsyan**, was released on bail till the end of the investigation, according to the decision of the court of first instance of SJ. **Nairi Irantsyan** is the member of the board of **United Javakhk Movement** and member of the district sakrebulo of Akhalkalak. **Irantsyan** and activist of the same movement, **Artur Poghosyan**, were arrested because of argument with the driver of an Akhalkalak regional judge on 24 April.²⁰⁶

May:

- **Russians withdraw:** Another military convoy left Georgia.²⁰⁷
- **Government takes action – integration:** International sports and culture festival was held in Akhaltsikhe.²⁰⁸

June:

- **Government takes action – integration:** Georgian president visits SJ to open new sports center.²⁰⁹
- **Government takes action – integration:** Georgian Justice Minister visited Akhalkalaki to meet locals and answer questions.²¹⁰

July:

- **Government takes action – control:** Georgian militaries replaced Russians on Akhalkalaki military base.²¹¹

December:

- **Government takes action – control:** M. Saakashvili declared there is no separatist threat in SJ any more²¹²

²⁰³ JAVAHK.COM: 12 Armenians of Javakhk participated in Artsakh liberation struggle rewarded..., Apr. 17, 2007

²⁰⁴ JAVAHK.COM: Radical Armenians in Georgia insult Turkish flag, Apr. 25, 2007

²⁰⁵ JAVAHK.COM: Third military convoy left Russian base in Georgia, Apr. 25, 2007

²⁰⁶ JAVAHK.COM: Georgian court frees ethnic Armenian activist, Apr. 27, 2007

²⁰⁷ JAVAHK.COM: Fourth Russian truck convoy leaves Georgia for Gyumri, May 05, 2007

²⁰⁸ JAVAHK.COM: International sports and cultural festival finishes in Akhaltsikhe, May 15, 2007

²⁰⁹ JAVAHK.COM: M. Saakashvili's visit to Javakhk remains unnoticed for population, Jun 22, 2007

²¹⁰ JAVAHK.COM: Georgian Minister of Justice visits Akhalkalak to answer citizens' questions, Jun 29, 2007

²¹¹ JAVAHK.COM: Georgian flag raised over Akhalkalak, Jul. 07, 2007

²¹² JAVAHK.COM: No separatist sentiments in Javakheti, Dec. 27, 2007

Year 2008

July

- **Government takes action – pressure:** Javakhk organization activist and leader, **Vahagn Chakhalyan** was arrested by special police in Akhalkalaki on July 20.²¹³ Another Javakhk member, **Aram Batoyan**, was also arrested.
- **Government takes anti-Armenian/Russian stance** – Turkish president visited Kars to open the railway construction project.²¹⁴ Activation of police and arrest of Chakhalyan in June was viewed as preventive measures of Georgian government connected with Baku-Tbilisi-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway construction.
- **Armenia supports kin** – Armenian Foreign Minister announced that Yerevan keeps close eye to Javakheti situation.²¹⁵

August

- **War erupted between Georgian and Russia over South Ossetia**
- **NGOs collaborate with Armenia/Russia:** Armenian NGOs of SJ made declaration on August 19, stating that in order to resolve the ethnic conflicts in an objective, just and legal manner, Georgia should have a federal state structure, composed of territorial units and a central government.²¹⁶
- **Provocation** – a bomb exploded near the house of Akhalkalaki police chief
- **Government takes action – control:** **Eduard Saharyan** (United Javakhk member) and his brother **Ararat Saharyan** were arrested on charges of “hooliganism”. According to some reports, he was severely beaten and released after 20 days of detention.²¹⁷

October

- **Armenia supports kin** – Armenia-based **Yerkir Union** has launched campaign in defense of Vahagn Chakhalyan. Yerkir sent letters and petitions to several Georgian and international institutions requesting release of Chakhalyan from custody.

²¹³ JAVAKHK.COM: Kars-Akhalkalaki railroad: construction starts with bloody developments, Jul 24, 2008

²¹⁴ JAVAKHK.COM: Gul in Kars for start of "iron silk road" construction (Ankara), Jul. 24, 2008

²¹⁵ JAVAKHK.COM: RA MFA closely watches situation in Javakhk, Jul. 25, 2008

²¹⁶ JAVAKHK.COM: Armenian NGOS of Javakhk consider formation of federal state as only way to solve..., Aug. 20, 2008

²¹⁷ JAVAKHK.COM: Edward Saharian gets kidney problem after being beaten by Georgian policemen, Aug. 27, 2008

POTENTIAL LEADERS OF SEPARATIST INITIATIVES

As the above overview shows, outright separatism (understood as detaching the region from Georgia) is not strong among SJ ethnic Armenians. Collaborationism is the strongest threat that exists in the region. Traditionally, this has been collaboration with Russia and, to a much lesser extent, Armenia.

Virk, Javakhk, and SJ NGOs (normally represented as “**Coalition of Armenian NGOs**”) are the ones normally involved in direct collaboration with outside forces.

The same organizations normally raise demands regarding the autonomy, language status, and providing Armenian history classes in the secondary schools while this cannot be considered outright separatism but as “hot topics” to gain public support. On the other hand, this means that mentioned issues really worry people.

While Virk has weakened during the last years and has even cooperated with the government, **Vahagn Chakhalyan**, 26, became the most active leader of Javakhk Union. Formerly, **David Rstakyan** has been the most important leader of Virk movement and it is probable that he still maintains considerable influence.

Other members of Javakhk, who have been active in recent years, include **Aram Batoyan** who seems to be a close ally of Chakhalyan, and **Khachik Saharyan**, businessman with ties in Russia. It could be assumed that Saharyan is more pro-Russian than pro-Armenian and thus more prone to support separatism (incl. financially).

There are certain forces in Armenia who are inclined to support separatism in SJ, although their stance is weaker than of those with stronger Russian ties (like Chakhalyan, Saharyan, and Batoyan). First of all, this is political party **ARFD (Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutsyun)**. “**Hazor Hayrenik**” (Powerful Homeland) party is another political force in Armenia which is likely to support separatism in SJ, and Yerevan based “**Virahayeri Miasnutiun**” (Unity of Georgian Armenians) is yet another organization which has previously dismissed claims to support separatism in SJ.

Besides, there is a well-known and powerful leader called **Zhirayr Sefilyan**, former Karabakh fighter ranked Colonel. Sefilyan is known for his extreme nationalist views and has at least one provided finances to **Tigran Khzmalyan** – a film director who filmed nationalist “documentary” called “From Araks to Kur, from Artsakh to Javakhk”.

Javakhk (has changed its name several times, today: United Javakhk). Officially the movement had 5,000 members. There has always been differences within the movement regarding the strategy of activity, though the organisation pretended to be monolithic. The most radical members of the Javakh or those who are under the influence of the Armenian party of ARF Dashnaktsutsyun demand that the province be united with to Armenia. Traditionally, those members of Javakhk who’ve been close to the SJ-elected MPs, or the prosecutors and heads of administrations of the region, represented a pro-Georgian wing of the organization. This trend preserves to this date. Representatives of the most extreme wings of the Javakhk did not play a significant role in the movement but today the movement has further radicalized under Vahagn Chakhalyan.

Virk political party was established in 1999. Armenian nationalists, who have operated under an umbrella group called Javakhk, have formed a more radical party called Virk (the medieval Armenian name for Georgia). The Georgian Justice Ministry refused to register the party citing its “regional” character.” Virk’s stated aim was a “federal” Georgia in which Javakheti would be a separate entity. The nationalists, who were pro-Russian and anti-Turkish, were against possible passage through the region of the BTC pipeline. They were clearly the force upon which Russia relied to keep its presence in the region.

Virk and Javakhk had disagreement during years, but by 2002, agreement was reached, Javakhk has almost fallen apart and its leaders moved to be Virk’s active members. Virk is known to have very close ties with Russia. Virk leads its activities in the name of Armenian national movement and over 10 000 members are affiliated with it.

Coalition of Armenian NGOs – it seems that it’s just the “boost” for Virk and Javakhk because there is no evidence of some independent activities of the organization. Different organizations that also seem to mostly exist on paper, have at least once signed under the Coalition umbrella in the past. These include:

- Akunk Union of Akhalkalaki,
- A-Info Union of Akhalkalaki,
- Sports and Culture Union of Javakhk,
- Lernashkhar Union of Ninotsminda,
- Charles Aznavour Culture Union of Akhaltsikhe,
- Akhaltsikhe Center for Democracy Development and Reforms,
- Akhalkalaki Areg Art Charity Union,
- Akhalkalaki War Veterans Union,
- Javakhk Chapter,
- Youth Sports and Culture Union of Javakhk Writers,
- Javakhk Armenian Sports General Union,
- Javakhk Chapter Lernashkhar Union,
- Ninotsminda ODA Union,
- Armenian Diocesan Council of Tehran.

It should be noted that most of these NGOs have “parallel” organizations in Armenia (with approximately the same names).

SJ separatism supporters, their ends and means

There has been only one supporter of outright separatism in SJ, and this is Russia. Moscow's main objective was to pressure Tbilisi over the issue of military bases, stop BTC and BTE (Erzurum) pipelines, Nabucco project and Baku-Akhalkalaki-Kars railway.

Armenia cannot be regarded as supporter of separatism in Georgia. On the contrary, Yerevan has been very supportive during years in handling ethnic problems in SJ and has even opposed Russia over SJ separatism issue. However, Armenia tries to maintain influence in the region to pressure Tbilisi over the issue of Kars railway. But Yerevan is capable of creating only internal pressure like triggering dissatisfaction and demands like autonomy, language status, etc. Yerevan cannot go further with escalation because Armenia is landlocked between Azerbaijan and Turkey, and Georgia is the only corridor for Armenian supplies, including energy supplies and electricity grid.

Means and methods to support favorable trends in SJ has complicated for Russia since there is no Russian military base any more. However, because there is considerable Russian military presence in Gyumri base (Armenia) close to Georgian border, and since there is free movement across the Georgian-Armenian border, Moscow still maintains means to recruit and direct its agents. But huge difference is still in place: Russia will no longer be able to freely disseminate weapons in local population, and today we face significantly improved law enforcement capabilities in the region – with police special units and even Georgian military base in Akhalkalaki.

Traditional methods to sow unrest in SJ include bribing, supplying money and weapons to the activists, indoctrination of the leaders and information support.

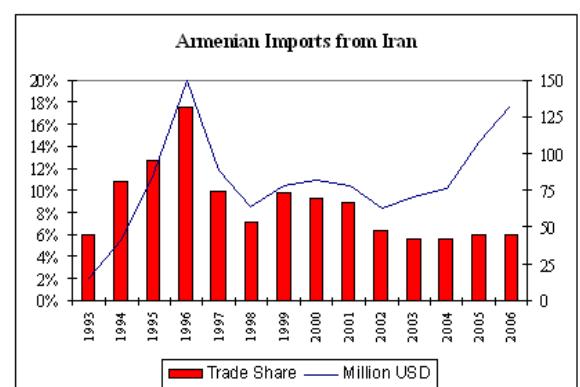
Influence of potential separatism on planned and existing energy transit projects

Influence of potential separatism on energy transit projects is huge, but the potential of separatism is not very high: Armenia is not willing to support separatism due to above described circumstances, Georgia undertakes effective control of the region, and Russians are no longer present in SJ.

The only possibility that energy-transit projects undergo danger is a scenario where Russia achieves full control of the South Caucasus or spur serious unrest in SJ. It should be noted also, that unlike its stance regarding energy projects, Kars railway project is very sensitive to Armenia and Yerevan may attempt to trigger serious tensions if this goes on. The dynamics of the developments in the region has shown that tensions immediately restarted after July, 2008 when Turkey announced the start of construction of the Turkish part of the railway.

Consequences for Armenian-Georgian relation of the potential conflict in SJ

During Russian-Georgian war in August, 2008 Armenian economy has suffered over 0.6 billion USD only because the railway that passes through Georgia was damaged for about two weeks. That said, Armenia is landlocked between Turkey and Azerbaijan, and Georgia is almost the only connection with the outside world. Iran is another possible route for Yerevan but Armenian businessmen cannot trade via Iran because of lengthy routes and US embargo. Besides, there is no effective connection between Armenia and Iran but notably, Yerevan tries to create such connection with Russian approval. On 8th of December, 2008, Armenian PM visited Moscow to discuss Iran-Armenia railroad plans with PM Putin.²¹⁸



<http://armenianeconomist.blogspot.com/2008/05/armenia-iran-trade-relations.html>

Armenia's trade relations with Iran are very weak (about 6% of total trade, only 8% of total imports) and its major part depends on communications that pass through Georgia (about 60% of Armenian imports come through

²¹⁸ ARKA News Agency: Armenian Premier discusses construction of Iran-Armenia railroad with his Russian counterpart, Dec. 08, 2008, retrieved from: <http://www.arka.am/eng/transport/2008/12/08/12325.html>

Georgian territory).²¹⁹ Hence, there is clear understanding in Yerevan that Armenia needs some alternative links with the outside world. Besides building a big highway, in March 2007 Armenia opened a new natural gas pipeline with Iran. Moscow has pressed to halve the initially planned diameter of the pipeline to the critical minimum because Russia approves Iran-Armenian links just to a degree that allows Armenia's survival in critical situations.²²⁰ These critical situations are clearly the scenarios of Russian aggression in Georgia, while Russia has orchestrated feelings in SJ Armenians that the real threat is Turkey with its plans to build Kars railroad and cut SJ kin from their historic homeland.

In this situation it gets very clear that if separatist problem rises in SJ then it means that Armenia is cut off communications and it becomes entirely dependent on Iran – which would be a real disaster for the country's economy.

Consequences for Georgia of the potentially improved relations between Armenia and Turkey

Turkish – Armenian relations and their connotation for Georgia can be understood only in the context of Turkey's new political identity and a wider game some key issues of which are very briefly discussed below. For Turkey and Armenia, this "game" involves Russia, the EU, the USA, NATO, Iran, Iraq, Central Asia, and Middle East.

Russia and changing Turkey

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has served Russia to block direct communication between Azerbaijan and Turkey. It took years for Turkey and the West to bridge the two countries via Georgian territory. Obliging Russia during 1999 OSCE summit in Istanbul to withdraw bases from Tbilisi, Batumi and Akhalkalaki was of key importance for that bridge to live: for centuries, Russia used to be a direct regional rival for Turkey and the two countries have developed contradictory geostrategic schemes of regional domination.

However, Turkish political identity is being changed now. The process has gone through two trends: (1) development of Turkey's outlook as more prosperous country; and (2) Turkey's outlook as of more independent state, requiring more autonomy from its traditional partners.

The first trend has started with the end of the Cold War, which gave Turkey the new identity which implies bridging of Europe and Asia, developing of the economy and improving the social status of the population. In 1990s and early 2000s, this was viewed as continuation of the US- and NATO-backed horizontal axis in Eurasia – enabling to circumvent Russia in Caspian and Central Asian energy dealings. Because this "Eurasian bridge" needed free access to Azerbaijan and then to Central Asia, and considering US-Iran relations and Karabakh conflict realities, Georgia appeared the most appropriate link between Turkey and Azerbaijan. Hence, Georgia appeared key country not only for the "new Turkish identity" to get real but also for diversification of the EU's energy supplies and prevention of Russia from stretching its influence in the South and to the West. Turkey played a key role in this game – but with close strategic partnership with the USA and Europe.

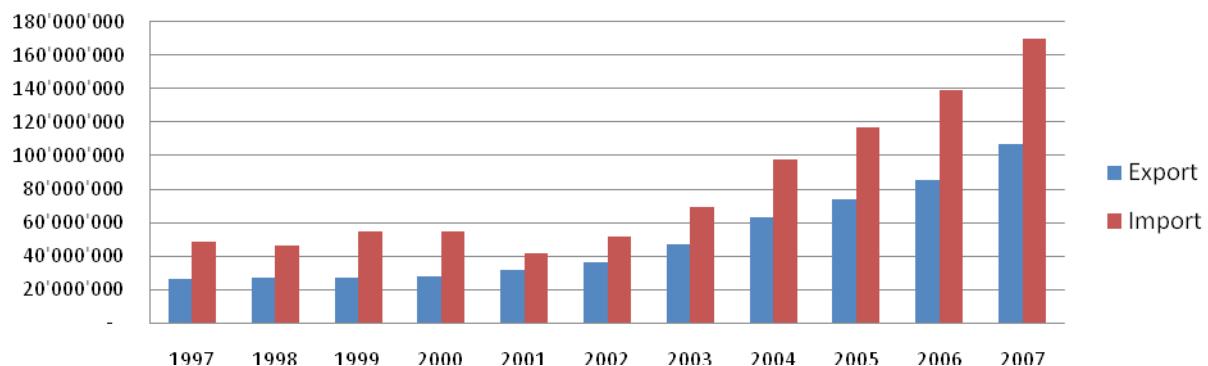
The second trend has apparently intensified with the USA-Iraq war, i.e. with the first serious clash of interests between the USA and Turkey. When the war nevertheless started, it was in Ankara's interest to exercise stronger control over Iraqi Kurds – something that Washington was very reluctant to allow. The third, protracted, issue was Turkey's bid for EU membership. As time passed and hopes lessened, Turkey has developed more indifferent stance toward the issue, while enjoying economic benefits of the free trade regime and customs preferences with the EU – which allowed Ankara to carry out successful institutional reforms and triple its economy over the last 6 years. As a consequence, as the economy grew and the feeling of increasing independence just followed, Turkey has developed the outlook of even stronger independence where EU and NATO membership are no longer the building blocks of Turkey's political self-consciousness but just the tools that Ankara is willing to play at its best result. Erdogan's JDP does just that – it supports increasing nationalist ideology domestically, while flirts with Russia (e.g. "blue stream" project) and defies the USA, NATO and the EU. It is very important to note that despite

²¹⁹ WEXPOT: Armenia Trade Profile, 2007, retrieved from: www.wexpot.biz/download/Asia/Armenia%20Trade%20Profile.pdf

²²⁰ ARMENIADIASPORA.COM: Armenia, Iran open key gas pipeline, Mar. 19, 2007, retrieved from: <http://www.armeniadiaspora.com/ADC/news.asp?id=2135>

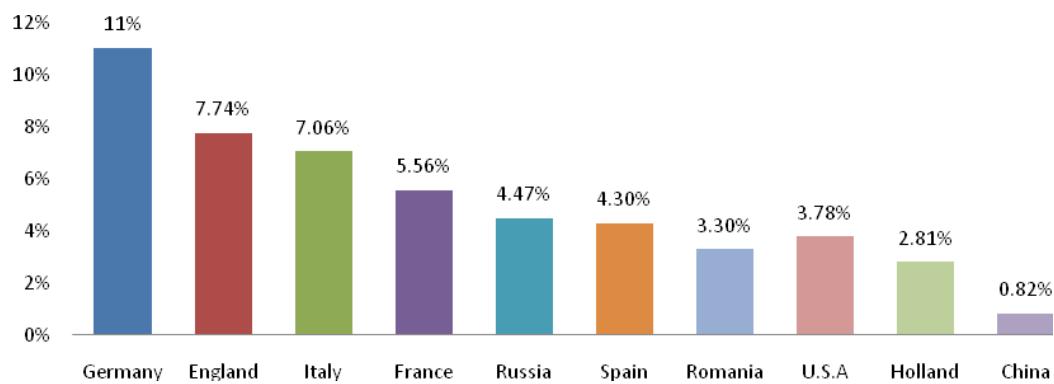
constant tension between the Turkish General Staff and JDP, General Staff has several times tolerated Erdogan's policies in view of large popular support to the Party.

Chart 1: Turkey's foreign trade between 1997 and 2007 (000 \$)²²¹



Thus, it is not only geopolitical antagonism with Russia that drives Turkey's foreign policy today. Rather, this is Turkey's wider concept of economic and political independence and long-term security, and this concept is no longer attached solely to the EU or even NATO membership.

Chart 2: Turkey's Main Export Partners in 2007²²²



Turkey's new identity is well portrayed by the country's diversified trade relations, especially its energy-dealings with Russia, Iran and Turkmenistan, as well as its already traditional partnership with Azerbaijan. It is noteworthy that Turkey retained considerable trade relations with Iran despite the US position and embargo that was imposed on Iran by Washington.

Roughly about 50% of Turkey's exports and 35% of imports are associated with the EU and the USA. 4.47% (\$4.75 billion) of Turkey's exports and 14% (\$23.5 billion) of imports is Russia's share. Energy imports constitute the largest share of Turkey's trade with Russia (40% of oil imports and about 65% of natural gas imports).²²³ Also, Turkish companies started to actively engage in Russian consumer markets. In 2007, trade turnover between the two countries amounted in USD 28 billion (\$23.5 billion imports) and, besides, USD 38 billion trade volume was expected by the end of 2008. Also, Russia is the fifth biggest importer of Turkish goods with USD 4.7 billion annual worth, and Turkish companies have made USD 6 billion worth long-term investments in Russia. Also, Turkish

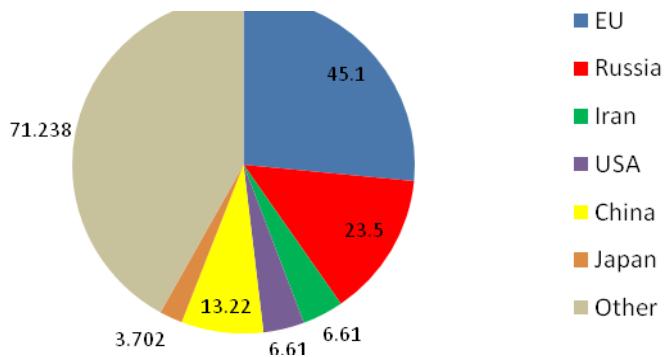
²²¹ USAK, *Changing Nature of Turkey's Trade Structure*, by Mustafa Kutlay, Turkish Economy Studies, retrieved from: <http://www.usak.org.tr/EN/makale.asp?id=696>

²²² Ibid

²²³ Gereth Jenkins, *Ongoing Trade Crisis Demonstrates Turkey's Lack Of Leverage Against Russia*, 09/09/2008, Jamestown Foundation, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Retrieved from: http://www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2373353, last viewed on: 02/10/2008

construction companies have secured USD 20 billion worth contracts in 20 years and Russian tourism in Turkey is the second biggest with 2.5 million tourist turnover each year.²²⁴

Chart 3: Turkey's Import Structure, 2007 (billion \$)²²⁵



Thus, despite Turkey's strong trade dependence with the EU, its engagement is so deep today with Russia that Ankara will think twice until deciding on overt confrontation with Moscow. It could be considered doubtless, therefore, that **Turkey would challenge Russia only if it feels immediately threatened by the Kremlin's policies**. Diversification of mutual relations is otherwise handy for Ankara, as this is seen as good policy toward stronger independence.

New realities in the South Caucasus and Turkey

It is very important to correctly identify Turkey's stance toward the August war between Georgia and Russia. Basically, there are two possible answers: this is either perception of being directly threatened by Russia, or the belief that Moscow can do nothing against Ankara's role as main energy corridor, and the war has even improved Turkey's role in the region (while decreasing of that of the USA). There is a scenario also, where both perceptions match together.

This perception of being threatened – has two possible dimensions. **One** is perception of being immediately threatened, which means that Russia can jeopardize Turkey's immediate economic interests like banning Turkish imports and stopping the energy supplies to Turkey, as well as stopping oil drifts through Georgia (BTC, Baku-Supsa). **The second** is perception of long-term consequences like sealing by Russia of the Caspian and Central Asian resources and pushing Turkey back to the Cold War-style bandwagon with NATO. In other words, these are economic and geopolitical dimensions of the Russian-imposed threats on Turkey. Turkey's after-war diplomacy well portrays the belief that is given a priority in Ankara – it seems that **Ankara recognizes threats but also feels opportunity and also necessity for more independent foreign policy**.

Turkey has been faced with a very dangerous reality in August. In essence, had Russian tanks entered Tbilisi or had SJ separatism spurred, Turkey would find itself sealed by Russia and Ankara's dreams for energy-transit function would be heavily challenged. Many believe EU diplomacy was a key to stop Russian invasion in Georgia but close observation of Russian goals and the EU levers makes it unclear – how could the EU stop Russia, by which means and by what guarantees? These unanswered questions make it more realistic to believe that Erdogan's visit to Moscow on August 13th was of decisive importance for the Kremlin to decide on stopping the invasion. While this is only speculation, it still seems reasonable to believe that Erdogan promised to act independently in the region (read: help in reducing US influence). At least four evidences support such assumption: One is exclusion of the EU and the USA from the 10-year-old "Caucasus Stability Platform" which was proposed by S. Demirel and based on

²²⁴ Ibid

²²⁵ USAK, *Changing Nature of Turkey's Trade Structure*, by Mustafa Kutlay, Turkish Economy Studies, retrieved from: <http://www.usak.org.tr/EN/makale.asp?id=696>

3+2+2 format (the three South Caucasus states + Russia/Turkey + EU/USA). The new platform reads only 3+2 format (the three South Caucasus states + Russia/Turkey). Another sign of such agreement was that Ankara spoke up of the “Platform” without sending an early notice to Washington.²²⁶ The third sign was Turkey’s calling upon Montreux Convention to shun the US vessels from entering the Black Sea. Also, Turkish president Gul told Guardian in August that USA should better share power with its partners because the world cannot be managed from one center.²²⁷ These prove that Turkey has viewed the August war as good precondition to free from the US influence, and increase Ankara’s weight in the region. The main reason behind this move must be Ankara’s concerns that if the US vessels would enter the Black Sea then Turkey would find itself encircled from North and South (with US forces in Iraq), and this would mean that Ankara would finally lose independent bargaining power.

However, Ankara’s new policies are not flawless. By shunning away from NATO and the USA, Turkey risks to get trapped by Russia because, on one hand, it is hard to believe that Russia removes militaries from Georgia and Armenia, and on the other hand, it’s hard to believe that Turkey can freely trade oil and gas under Russian military supervision. Thus, it goes without saying that if Turkey agrees to share regional influence with Russia then it clearly needs additional support to balance Moscow. In this view, NATO acquires new (old) dimension for Turkey and Ankara will try to restore the spirit of genuine partnership in NATO, but also to secure the role of a key player in the region. However, because NATO’s function will be mainly deterrent against direct clash with Russia, Ankara needs special preventive measures to ensure that its regional influence is not reduced by factors other than direct confrontation with Russia.

These “other factors” can be, primarily, the SJ separatism and Nagorno-Karabakh resolution through Russian mediation. Turkey needs to ensure that Russia cannot challenge it by indirect action. Stemming from this perspective, bettered relations with Armenia is entirely in Ankara’s interest. However, certain strategic and geostrategic considerations are still in place and we can see their implication on current developments in the region. What we see today in Nagorno-Karabakh is competition between Turkey and Russia over the issue of Karabakh resolution. Both countries want to prevent another from leading the process because the leader will assume control (e.g. station peacekeepers). Therefore, it is expected that Ankara will employ strong links with Baku no prevent unfavorable resolution there (which means that no resolution will be possible in the nearest future). But Turkey’s relations with Armenia should not be strictly linked with the Karabakh conflict but to the border problem, too. While there are only few signs that Ankara really divides the issue on two parts, it is still credible that finally, this division will happen due to clear incentives to do so:

Notwithstanding that Russian military presence in Armenia do not allow new Armenian corridor, blockading of Armenia by Turkey leaves Yerevan with no option but to collaborate with Russia. Consequently, Ankara may have realized now that in order to change Russian status quo in Armenia in relatively long-term, opening of the border is required. Hence, “improvement” of relations between Turkey and Armenia is a two-fold problem comprising of the “border” and “Karabakh” issues. It is expected that, if anything, the border issue will be resolved first, followed by further talks about Karabakh.

Consequently, the new realities of the South Caucasus suggest few new moves for Turkey:

- Work with Russia on regional pact – to stop Moscow’s aggression and de-escalate the situation
- Try to substitute the USA role in the region – with more activist foreign policy, by restricting US military presence, and improving Ankara’s weight in NATO (and better chances for EU membership)
- Maintain status-quo regarding existing energy-routes, and
- Try to pacify region – improve relations with Armenia, work with Georgia and Russia and create the circumstances that would stop Russia from further escalation

²²⁶ Cyprus PIO: Turkish Press and Other Media, 08-09-23: *Details on Babacan-Rices meeting in New York, Rice: Turkey is an excellent ally*, retrieved from <http://news.pseka.net/index.php?module=article&id=9100#15>, see also: *Turkish news for week ending 30 August 2008*, at: http://groups.google.com/group/alt.culture.turkish.politics/browse_thread/thread/91cfb064367a5a60?pli=1

²²⁷ Guardian: US must share power in new world order, says Turkey’s controversial president, by Stephen Kinzer, Aug. 16, 2008

- Pursue long-term strategy – with minimal goal being controlled, fragile peace

Armenia between Russia and Turkey

Russia is a double-edged sword for Armenia. On one hand, this is protection from Azerbaijan and Turkey, and on the other hand, this is Armenia's service to Russian interests often contrary to its own concerns. Armenia can retain occupied territories only if it keeps Russian bases, but economic problems are so hard for the country, that Yerevan will be ready to concede some of its positions if they have relevant security guarantees. That said, today Russia is main warrantor of Armenia's security, while sealed communications is huge problem to the country. Thus, Armenia will be inclined to negotiate with Turkey about the border issues, while leaving Karabakh resolution as hopeful. Russia may also tolerate border opening between Turkey and Armenia in exchange of Turkey's tolerance toward the new regional status quo (recently increased Russian control over the energy routes).

For Turkey, Russian militaries in Armenia represent real challenge. But Armenia will never allow the bases go if they do not have very reliable security guarantees. However, Turkey's concept of interdependent communication and energy routes is only general idea so far, and so it's impossible to discuss its viability today. What is clear is that the best strategy against Russia is a format that suggests a very reliable security for all three states of the South Caucasus.

Caucasus Stability [Platform] and implications for Georgia

For above reasons, and holding all else constant, it is likely that current negotiations about the "Caucasus Stability Platform" between the five states (Turkey, Russia, and Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia) will suggest restoring of relations between Armenia and Turkey, but it is unlikely that anything real will be proposed regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. It is also likely, that Russia and Turkey demand that Georgia signs agreements on non-resumption of fire in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Besides, some formal provisions may be proposed about the security arrangement of the South Caucasus, including, first of all, prevention of integration of the regional states into NATO.

Such outcome, if proved accurate, means that new game is launched in the South Caucasus: Turkey will receive new levers to internally influence situation in Armenia in order to create the perception of excessiveness of the Russian bases in the region, and Russia will have opportunities to further aggravate situation in Georgia (most likely – in SJ – where the BTC passes through). The logic is that Russia needs to control energy-routes in South Caucasus and for that, needs military forces next to the pipelines. Even if Nagorno-Karabakh is resolved, Russian military presence in Armenia (currently – Gyumri base near the Georgian border and a planned Ijevan base near the Azeri border) guarantees that Moscow will be able to further aggravate situation if needed, and directly threaten a [would-be] Armenian corridor. On the other hand, if Russia makes the first move and spurs [successful] separatism in SJ, then Turkey will become totally dependent on Russian goodwill – and such situation is fraught with total war in the South Caucasus.

Turkey's any second move in Armenia is likely to provoke Russian action in SJ:

	STATUS QUO:	1	1'	2	2'
Russian bases	+	+	+	+	-
Karabakh conflict	+	+	-	-	-
A/T Border sealed	+	-	+	-	-
SJ conflict	-	-	-	+	-

+ exist

- do not exist

